

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE NOVELS OF IRIS MURDOCH

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Town, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Cape Town: September 1988.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I have departed from the prevalent critical concentration on the affiliations between Murdoch's fiction and philosophy, and have attempted to explore the relationship between her narrative techniques and the conventions of realism. In doing so, I use the narrative theory of Dorrit Cohn, who proposes that novelists concerned to render a sense of "reality" are also those who construct the most elaborate and artificial fictive worlds and characters. I propose that Murdoch's "real-isation" of her fictional world incorporates the problems of access to, and representation of the real. This links her to two ostensibly antithetical traditions: that of British realism (within which she would place herself), and also a fictional mode consonant with the poststructuralist writing that focuses on such problems.

An examination of the early novels in terms of the correlation between "realism" and technical sophistication implied by Cohn reveals a division of narrative purpose that Murdoch has herself described in the early part of her career as an alternation between "open" and "closed" novels. I suggest in the thesis that these two fictional modes are deliberate choices of style on Murdoch's part, rather than a "failed" realism, and that their different readerly rewards are compounded by the successful merging of these competing views of the real in the later novels. My narratological emphasis in this dissertation indicates also the ways in which Murdoch's fiction incorporates the comedic, the romantic and the gothic into a framework of orthodox verisimilitude, utilising the clashes between these genres to foreground the difficulties of a unified view. This is particularly successful in the first-person novels, where the overt problematising of self-representation paradoxically feeds into our sense of their "realism".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Human Sciences Research Council and the University of Cape Town for financial assistance that has helped to make this research and writing possible.

My supervisor, Dr Gail Fincham, not only offered unfailing insight and perceptive advice, but was consistently encouraging and enthusiastic about this project; any failings are all my own. For their advice and help, I would like to thank Eduard Fagan, Patrick Fish and Sue Joubert; for book-hunting in London, Lundi Swain. Michael Gresty's encouragement and help sustained me through the final year, as did the consistent good cheer of my siblings and Carol Sulcas. Most importantly, thanks are due to my parents, without whose support, both emotional and material, I could not have written this thesis.

I would like to express my gratitude also to Dame Iris Murdoch, who agreed to an informal interview, and answered my queries with great kindness and patience.

EDITIONS USED

An Accidental Man. Triad/Panther: London 1979.

The Bell. Triad/Panther: London 1976.

The Black Prince. Chatto and Windus: London 1974.

A Fairly Honourable Defeat. Penguin: Harmondsworth 1972.

The Good Apprentice. Chatto and Windus: London 1985.

Nuns and Soldiers. Penguin: Harmondsworth 1981.

The Philosopher's Pupil. Penguin: Harmondsworth 1984.

The Sea, The Sea. Triad/Granada: London 1980.

The Unicorn. Chatto and Windus: London 1963.

Under the Net. Penguin: Harmondsworth 1960.

PREFACE

This thesis aims to consider the technical strategies that underlie Iris Murdoch's commitment to the traditional realist novel and simultaneous awareness of the difficulty of representing, or gaining access to, the "real". In the introductory chapter I discuss Murdoch's relationship to both the realist tradition and the poststructuralist critique of that tradition, and place her writings in their context of post-war literary trends in England and France. I also outline the development of narrative theory as a branch of fictional poetics, and consider the utility of its insights for a study of the particular components and effects of Murdoch's work. In Chapter Two, using Dorrit Cohn's theoretical categories, I look at two early third-person novels, *The Bell* and *The Unicorn*, as examples of Murdoch's employment of both realist and romance conventions; an alternation of styles evident in her early work and which, I argue, are successfully combined in the later novel, *An Accidental Man*. In Chapter Three I again use Cohn's categories to discuss first-person narration in *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince*, and propose that this mode offers Murdoch a means of reconciling the tensions between competing views of reality. This brings me to a detailed study of *The Sea*, *The Sea* in Chapter Four, where I move from a technically specific discussion of Murdoch's fictional strategies to the broader questions of formal organisation and genre. In conclusion, I briefly consider Murdoch's most recent work, and relate its developments to my earlier discussions.

"Only art explains, and that cannot itself be explained."

(Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince*)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the period since the publication of her first novel, *Under the Net*, in 1954, Iris Murdoch has emerged as one of the most important and productive English novelists of her generation as well as a leading moral philosopher and the author of a number of influential articles on contemporary fiction. In both her novels and her critical writings she has attempted to grapple with the difficulties and potentialities of contemporary fiction, emphasising her intention to write as a realist in an identifiable tradition of English and European fiction, while acknowledging the virtual impossibility of doing so in an age of aesthetic and epistemological uncertainty. Critical response to this dually-focused enterprise has been understandably schizophrenic from the start: "*Under the Net* is a winner", wrote Kingsley Amis, reviewing the novel in 1954, while *The New Statesman* dismissed the same novel as "cafe writing".¹ Subsequent readers, alienated by Murdoch's middle-class *milieux* and proliferation of civil servants have demonstrated marked hostility at this recalcitrantly old-fashioned subject matter at an historical moment of deep scepticism about social continuity and the possibility of its literary representation. On the other hand, the puzzling texture and exotic patterning of the novels has led to cries of betrayal from reviewers who value what Bernard Bergonzi has called "the English

¹. Quoted by McEwan, Neil, *The Survival of the Novel*. Macmillan: London 1981, 38.

Ideology";² a sense of English literary culture as untheoretical and of the nineteenth century realist text as a literary paradigm for the contemporary novel.

That Murdoch's consistently stated desire to write within a realist tradition³ is not an argument for a return to the nineteenth century, but for a literature that is nourished by its ancestry, is a distinction largely ignored by both of these captious groupings, who have equally plundered her theoretical writing for handy critical ammunition. The impulse behind nineteenth-century realism was the attentive perception and depiction of the history of characters and *milieux*: original polemical statements of realism fought hard to assert that the realist writer was merely a scribe for society; that the author's production was a mirror of life reflecting "the blue of the skies and the mire of the road below".⁴ Murdoch's sense of an artistic tradition of realism, within which she would hope to situate her own work, is clearly broader than the particular historical developments peculiar to the novel and would include Shakespeare and great artists of every period who have attempted to render a sense of "reality" rather than a mimetic realism. This reality, or

². Bergonzi, Bernard, *The Situation of the Novel*. Macmillan: London 1970, 60.

³. see Rose, W.K., "Iris Murdoch, Informally", *London Magazine*, 8(June 1968), 59-73; Bellamy, Michael O., "An Interview with Iris Murdoch", *Contemporary Literature*, XXVIII, no.2, 129-140; Haffenden, John, *Novelists in Interview*. Methuen: London and New York 1985, 191-209.

⁴. Quoted in the Introduction to Stendhal, *Scarlet and Black*. Penguin: Harmondsworth 1981, 11.

"true" perception of the world, is a development of Platonic thought and is fundamentally alien to a conventional literary realism in its acknowledgement of the world's incomprehensibility and the difficulty of perceiving it accurately. The search for reality in her fiction is less historical (although she is arguably attempting to portray the condition of a certain segment of English society that Conradi names "the chattering classes" (8)) than transcendental; involving the hopeless quest for knowledge, for the good, for an acceptance of the world that we live in rather than the one we continually create by our infinite store of illusions. The practice of realism is thus, for Murdoch, a moral practice involving careful attention (a term she borrows from Simone Weil) to the presentation of character within a dynamic picture of human society that constitutes a "steady and opaque framework".⁵

Her achievement is, then, a difficult one to assess, and not merely in the way that all contemporary writing is properly resistant to objective critical scrutiny. She is both a powerfully intellectual, allusive writer and the possessor of a seductive narrative drive: both concerned to reveal the particularity and contingency of character and action and to question the elements and assumptions which go into their making. As Peter Conradi points out, Murdoch, like her near-contemporary, John Fowles, attempts to find a form in which the contingent moral agent can be

⁵. Murdoch, Iris, "Important Things", *The Sunday Times*, 17 February 1957.

freed from the myth that must necessarily contain him;⁶ an enterprise doomed to defeat, if at best fairly honourably so (to paraphrase the title of her thirteenth novel). Fowles's commitment to the "authentication" of characters and readers has led to his overt exposure of the text as a fictional construct; a strategy increasingly adopted by contemporary writers anxious to absolve literature of its ontological guilt. By contrast, Murdoch struggles against the lure of the Romantic legacy of emancipation that Fowlesian "metafiction" has so oddly married to this epistemological scepticism,⁷ perceiving in it too simple a division between a coherent self and an "external" society: "An unexamined sense of the strength of the machine is combined with an illusion of leaping out of it",⁸ she writes in a discussion of existentialism as the philosophic disseminator of this conception of the isolated and freely choosing will.

Murdoch has criticised both existentialism and liberalism for their adherence to this Romantic conception of the human personality in terms that oddly concur with a poststructuralist critique of literary realism. In *Critical Practice*, Catherine Belsey argues that the concurrence of capitalism and expressive

⁶. Conradi, Peter, *John Fowles*. Methuen: London and New York 1982, 29. As I will refer to Dr Conradi's book on Murdoch, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*, far more frequently, I will provide the date in any subsequent references to his other critical writings.

⁷. I will discuss metafiction and its relationship to Murdoch's work in Chapter Three.

⁸. Murdoch, Iris, *The Sovereignty of Good*. Ark Paperbacks 1985, 48.

realism "is more than coincidental";⁹ that both depend on the ideology of liberal humanism in which the individual is construed as a "free, unified, autonomous subjectivity" (Belsey, 67). Similarly, Murdoch writes that "We have bought the Liberal theory [of personality] as it stands, because we have wished to encourage people to think of themselves as free, at the cost of surrendering the background",¹⁰ and that existentialism "is a natural mode of being in the capitalist era. It is attractive, and indeed to most of us still natural, because it suggests individualism, self-reliance, private conscience, and what we ordinarily think of as political freedom".¹¹ Whereas Belsey would like to deconstruct the "Liberal theory of personality" in order to reveal the "interpellation of the subject" (67) by the correlative ideologies of liberalism and realism, Murdoch maintains that the persistent exploration and expansion of a theory of personality can itself perform a revelatory function by potentially exposing us to a world larger than the one our conditioning has taught us to believe in. Both, in essence, are critical of an unquestioning and complacent response to fiction, despite their very different critical orientations. Belsey's description of realism as a "model of intersubjective communication, of shared understanding of a text

⁹. Belsey, Catherine, *Critical Practice*. Methuen: London and New York 1980, 7.

¹⁰. Murdoch, Iris, "Against Dryness", *Encounter*, January 1961, 18. All further references to this article will be abbreviated as AD.

¹¹. Murdoch, Iris, "Existentialists and Mystics", in Robson, W. (ed.), *Essays and Poems Presented to Lord David Cecil*. London 1970.

which re-presents the world" and which "is the guarantee not only of the truth of the text but of the reader's existence as an autonomous and knowing subject in a world of knowing subjects" (69), is paralleled by Murdoch's conviction that the realist artist must not succumb to the re-presentation of what science or psychology has told us to be true, nor pander to readers' expectations:

literature...has taken over some of the tasks formerly performed by philosophy. Through literature we can re-discover a sense of the density of our lives. Literature can arm us against consolation and fantasy and can help us to recover from the ailments of Romanticism. If it can be said to have a task now, that surely is its task. (AD, 20)

Like any realist project, this enterprise cannot avoid immersion in the difficulties of authorial responsibility and involvement, and the ironies of "telling the truth" through the forms of fiction. This is, of course, a major theoretical problem for self-styled realists: realism as an idea is essentially at odds with itself in that it must transform unstructured, quotidian life into an aesthetically unified representation of events. At the same time it involves the necessary retreat of the authorial voice, the hypothetical emptying of the author's power and personality from the work of art in order to create the illusion of autonomy. This is evidently an impossible undertaking; every realist writer must tangle with the concrete problems of narration, point of view, closure, temporality, and all the other terms in our vocabulary of form, whilst attempting to render an unmediated "reality". The size of this technical task - the evocation of formlessness through form - facing the nineteenth-century Realists called for a whole

new set of fictional techniques, ironically bringing the novel to terms with its own artifice. This is evident in a letter written by Flaubert in 1852 while working on *Madame Bovary*, today regarded as a classic realist text: "What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the internal strength of its style". Later in the same letter, he comments that "from the standpoint of pure Art one might almost establish the axiom that there is not such a thing as subject - style in itself being an absolute manner of seeing things".¹²

In an interview with Michael O. Bellamy, Murdoch points out her thematisation of this paradox in the recurrent opposition of the false form-making artist and the truth-telling religious figure, as in the pairing of Jake and Hugo in *Under the Net*, Anne and Randall in *An Unofficial Rose*, and Tallis and Julius in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.¹³ This tension is also, however, apparent in the puzzling texture of the novels, combining as they do both ironic comedic entertainment and a more stringent moral intent: while her oeuvre (twenty-three novels to date) illustrates her commitment to the craft of the novel, her games, tricks and ironies indicate her reluctant acquiescence to the artifice and unreality of this formal coercion of the world. Murdoch's practice of her own brand of realism means, in effect, a demonstration of the difficulty of any

¹². Steegmuller, Francis (ed. and transl.), *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1830-1857*. Faber and Faber: London 1979, 154.

¹³. Bellamy, Michael O., "An Interview with Iris Murdoch", *Contemporary Literature*, XXVIII, no.2, 129-140.

access to "reality", and to this end she juxtaposes the comic, the mythical, and the fantastic against the containing realistic structure that plays uneasy host to them, creating novels paradoxically "liable to the charge of colluding with the bewitchment they lament" (Conradi 1982, 30).

The attempt to negotiate some kind of *rapprochement* between a socially engaged mimetic form and the sense of relativism that increasingly permeates Western culture marks much contemporary English fiction. Until fairly recently, however, the prevailing critical view has been that the English novel "is no longer novel" (Bergonzi, 25) - that it has retreated into a cosy provincialism and conservatism as it maintains the last bastion of realism amidst increasing disdain in both France and America for the traditional liberal idea of character as a free and growing agent, and for plot as a significant ordering of experience. This "reaction against experiment" (as an American critic entitled his book about the post-war English novel¹⁴) can be seen as a response to the formal and stylistic artifice of Modernism by a new generation of writers who espoused the altered values of a welfare state. As Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer satirically remark of this post-war period, "the characteristic English novel became a contemplation of a working-class or lower middle-class youth wandering in a state of solemn but remediable social anguish along a canal bank near

¹⁴. Rabinowitz, Rubin, *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel: 1950-1960*. New York 1967.

Wakefield".¹⁵ Once again, the correlation between realism and liberalism - both proposing a parity between the personal and the public - is seen as apparent in these socially-concerned novels by the "angry young men" (with whom Murdoch was grouped) of the 1950s; the preoccupations of authors like Kingsley Amis, Alan Silitoe and David Storey with character, social class and morality set (approvingly) against the modernist shift of emphasis to the mythical and the symbolic. The novel's main theme was perceived to be the representation of society, and its mood - for all the appellations of anger - perhaps epitomised by the title of Kingsley Amis's *I Like It Here* (1958), which devoted itself to mocking the experimental and expatriate tradition in the novel "while indicating how much better England was than anywhere fancy abroad" (Bradbury and Palmer, 10).

This return to a concern with society and its representation was strongly approved by the characteristically moral and prescriptive literary criticism of the nineteen-forties and fifties, when the first really innovative studies began to grant to the novel the centrality as a modern form that Henry James had claimed for it at the turn of the century. F.R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* (1948), Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), and John Bayley's *The Characters of Love* (1960) - among others - were committed to an interpretation of the novel as a socio-moral form to an extent that A.S. Byatt suggests has to do with "the decline of religion and the

¹⁵. Bradbury, Malcolm, and Palmer, David, (eds.), *The Contemporary English Novel*. Edward Arnold: London 1979, 9-10.

substitution of a Religion of Humanity"¹⁶ in the form of the realist texts of the Great Tradition. Perhaps for this reason critics largely ignored the emergence of a fiction constructed in terms of an inbuilt aesthetic discourse with this literary tradition; a discourse with what Nathalie Sarraute called the true enemy of good art: "the only real, the deadly danger, the great works of the past".¹⁷ The need to simultaneously absorb and reject the fictive past has of course always been a matter of concern for the writer: here, however, the peculiar intensity of "the anxiety of influence"¹⁸ seems to have acted as a stimulus to a newly self-aware fiction. The decade of 1950-60 saw the publication of novels by Murdoch, Doris Lessing, Angus Wilson, William Golding, Lawrence Durrell, Muriel Spark and Antony Burgess; all "very doubtful members of any realist first eleven" (Bradbury and Palmer, 13) in their reactivation of the stress on art as forgery and on the surreal and fabulous dimension that partly constitutes the modernist impulse. A concomitant sense of the relativity of value and perception is evident during the sixties in the emergence of the work of John Fowles and B.S. Johnson. "We can no longer take language for granted as a medium of communication", says Murdoch in her book on Sartre: "We are like people who for a long time looked out of a window without noticing the glass - and then one day began

¹⁶. Byatt, A.S., "People in Paper Houses", in Bradbury and Palmer (ed), *The Contemporary English Novel*, 21.

¹⁷. Quoted by Byatt, A.S., "People in Paper Houses", 21.

¹⁸. Bloom, Harold, *The Anxiety of Influence: a Theory of Poetry*. New York 1973.

to notice this too".¹⁹ The categorisation of Murdoch as an "angry young man", after the publication of *Under the Net* in 1954, points in fact to the persistent critical desire for social realism, since she was in fact none of the above (that is, angry, particularly young or male!): the dedication to Raymond Queneau alone might have brought to more notice the novel's decidedly surrealistic qualities and vein of comic fantasy. Although this is largely to do with Murdoch's own background and interests, it also points to the influence of a new internationalism of form and perspective in the English novel. Writing about Queneau, the enormously influential French literary critic and theorist, Roland Barthes, comments on the paradox "which, perhaps, defines our literature today: he assumes the literary mask but simultaneously points at it";²⁰ a description that would serve the wide literary debts and distinctly cosmopolitan flavour of *Under the Net* too.

That form is never neutral and realism a myth of unified vision that is "the essential enemy, the bourgeois norm",²¹ is the central thrust of a series of brilliant works by Barthes that directly and indirectly added to the challenge to the British novel's relations with its own tradition and realism. In *Le Degré zero de l'écriture*, Barthes demonstrates how the usage of the past tense and the third person common to the traditional novel work to

¹⁹. Murdoch, Iris, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*. Fontana: London 1967.

²⁰. Quoted by Josipovici, Gabriel, "The Balzac of Barthes and de Guermantes", in Lerner, Laurence (ed.), *Reconstructing Literature*. Basil Blackwell: Oxford 1983, 105.

²¹. Quoted by McEwan, *The Survival of the Novel*, p.10.

enshrine "meaning" in a safely historicised narrative: "La finalité commune du Roman et de l'Histoire narrée, c'est d'aliéner les faits: le passé simple est l'acte même de possession de la société sur son passé et son possible" (Josipovici, 84).²² Barthes, writes Neil McEwan in a book defending the contemporary British novel from its reactionary reputation,²³ "was the champion over the last twenty-five years, of the cause of freeing literature from common sense and of separating modern fiction from all past traditions", supporting the writings of the French *nouveaux romanciers* in their attempts to abandon the conventions of nineteenth-century fiction. Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor and Nathalie Sarraute, amongst others, attempted to question the aesthetic, epistemological and linguistic implications of reality in order to "free" the reader from an authorial "meaning" and force a personal reconstruction of the text. To this end, language is made to foreground certain elements in the text - states of mind, objects of description - to the point where they exceed their apparent function and redefine literary parameters. "I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes", John Fowles writes in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; "if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word".²⁴

²². Josipovici translates this as "The ultimate purpose of the novel and of narrated history is to estrange us from events: the *passé simple* is the act itself of possession by society of its past and its possibilities."

²³. See footnote 1.

²⁴. Fowles, John, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. Pan Books: London 1987 (first published by Jonathon Cape Ltd 1969), 85.

This creative uncertainty about the relationship between language and its referents is discussed in Robert Scholes's *The Fabulators* (1967), in which he discusses a number of contemporary novelists concerned with exploiting the artificial nature of fiction and the "fictional" modes of allegory and romance. Scholes argues that we have been led to equate "narrative" with the nineteenth-century tradition by the "realist" orientation of works like Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis*; a tradition that now depends upon an eroded relationship between language and the world and which is no longer tenable. He notes approvingly that writers are therefore turning towards alternative modes of writing, like romance and allegory, in "an attempt to find a more subtle correspondence between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality".²⁵ For Scholes, as I have already suggested to be the case for Fowles, an avowedly "fictional" narrative is more "truthful" than a purportedly representational one, and serves to emancipate the contemporary writer from the duty of emulating George Eliot or Henry James: a critical shift that parallels the trend towards thematised self-reflexiveness in such novels as Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Muriel Spark's *The Comforters* (1963), John Fowles's already noted *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), and Murdoch's *The Black Prince* (1973).

Discussing *The Fabulators* in "The Novelist at the Crossroads", David Lodge supports the notion of the contemporary novel as a

²⁵. Scholes, Robert, *Fabulation and Metafiction*. University of Illinois Press 1980 (revised edition of *The Fabulators*. New York/London 1967).

synthesis of pre-existing narrative modes, but suggests that the binding element is realism, "which holds history, romance and allegory together in precarious synthesis, making a bridge between the world of discrete facts (history) and the patterned, economised world of art and imagination (allegory and romance)".²⁶ From this point of view, it is the conflict of interests between these worlds that characterises and energises much contemporary British fiction while it continues - generally - to operate "on the assumption that the reality which realism imitates actually exists" (Lodge, 109). This tension between realist collaboration with the political and epistemological status quo, and fictive subversion of its conventions has led, in Murdoch's case, to a literature in which "formal aporia and hesitation coexist with immense formal energy and inventiveness" (Conradi 1982, 21); a literature that displays its self-awareness in a manner that paradoxically intensifies its own illusionism. How this is achieved, and with what measure of success, is the aim of this study, which will attempt a departure from the prevalent critical concentration on the relationship between Murdoch's philosophy and its manifestation in her fictional writings; an emphasis which seems to me to sacrifice a consideration of the bountiful pleasures of the novels to an academic hunting of "sources" that does little to illuminate the way in which they work. To this end, I will give detailed consideration to her complex and shifting narrative voice as it partakes of, and in, the ambiguities of realism.

²⁶. Lodge, David, "The Novelist at the Crossroads", *The Novel Today*, 86.

The concept of narrative voice was introduced by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), a book that articulated critical distinctions that were both widely accepted and used within the Anglo-American critical tradition. Booth's emphasis is on novelistic techniques, "the rhetorical resources available to the writer...as he tries, consciously or unconsciously to impose his fictional world upon the reader".²⁷ Although he advocates the author's use of all available technical means, his polemical emphasis is on the uses of the author's voice; he shows the usefulness of direct authorial commentary and argues that even when this is renounced "the author's voice is still dominant in a dialogue that is at the heart of all experience with fiction." This thesis may seem markedly simplistic to us today, taking as it does an unproblematised conception of literature as a reflection of life - indeed of the author's conception of life - and treating language as a straightforwardly utilitarian means of realising novelistic intention. Despite the unsophisticated equation of narrative voice with the author's voice in its various technical and intentional embodiments, Booth performs an important function here in pointing to the embedding of different discourses within a fictional work, and to their revelatory quality when considering the work as a whole. In order to utilise this concept, however, it is necessary to briefly review the development of narrative poetics since the publication of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and to situate its insights within contemporary critical thought. To examine the

²⁷. Booth, Wayne, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London 1961 (Preface).

state of current narrative poetics, however, we need first to recall Aristotle's *Poetics* and its importance in any theory of the novel.

The orientation of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* is fundamentally *mimetic*, taking as its model the act of vision and perception. This model is central to the *Poetics*, where a distinction is made between the means of imitation (the medium, such as painting or language), the object of imitation (some aspect of human action), and the mode of imitation (how something is imitated). Thus, the object is perceived through the means and the mode, which work together to re-present, to "show" it to an audience. Although Aristotle's conception of mimesis applies primarily to theatrical performance,²⁸ the practitioners of the emerging novel clearly "perceived" their work in mimetic terms: "A novel," writes Smollett, "is a large diffused picture"; for Trollope, creating character involves filling "the canvas" with "real portraits"; George Eliot describes narration as demonstrating "the superior mastery of images and pictures in grasping the attention."²⁹ It was, however, Henry James who elevated the analogy into a theory of narration: "The novelist can only fall back on his recognition that man's constant demand for what he has to offer is simply man's general appetite for a *picture*".³⁰ James describes the writer's

²⁸. It was later extended to include imitations in painting and sculpture.

²⁹. All of these are quoted by Bordwell, David, *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Methuen: London and New York 1986, 7.

³⁰. James, Henry, *The Future of the Novel*. New York 1956, 33.

technical devices as including "reflectors", strategies of "framing and encircling" and the use of "point of view", linking the novel to post-Renaissance theatre's similar concern with the continuous employment of perspective as the key to the construction of an ideal viewer's orientation toward an enacted story. Dwelling in "the house of fiction," looking through windows that give on to "the human scene," the writer examines the world and proceeds to obey James's famous injunction: "dramatize, dramatize!"³¹

James's principal disseminator, Percy Lubbock, develops these pictorial and theatrical metaphors into a set of narratorial categories: the pictorial represents the action in the mirror of a character's consciousness, and the dramatic neutrally presents "the visible and audible facts of the case."³² The novel, in Lubbock's theory, synthesises the stability of the perspective painting and the temporal unfolding of drama. What both James and Lubbock - and their inheritors - ignore is the fact that the novel is a linguistic form; it is made up of words and must thus always have a "speaker", or less anthropomorphically, an "enunciator." It is of course ironic that James's own technical innovations - the creation of a "centre of consciousness", whose restricted point of view motivates the sensory and psychological texture of the novel - work to refine and heighten the verbal fabric, foregrounding language as a vehicle for "vision."

³¹. James, Henry, *The Art of the Novel*. New York 1934, 46.

³². Lubbock, Percy, *The Craft of Fiction*. New York 1962, 71.

If Aristotle may be credited with founding the mimetic tradition of narrative representation, Plato is the principal ancient spokesman for the conception that narration is fundamentally a linguistic activity. In book 3 of the *Republic*, he distinguishes between two principal types of storytelling, but gives both a linguistic emphasis: pure narrative, or *diegesis*, where "the poet himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone else is speaking"; and imitative narrative (*mimesis*), where the poet speaks through his characters "as if he were someone else."³³ This intimation that literature is above all the affair of language was taken up in the 1920s - the same time that Lubbock and other Anglo-American critics were promoting mimetic theories of narration - by the Russian Formalist critics who contended that representation is an *effect* of literary discourse, an effect of rhetoricity rather than a naive notion of referentiality. As such, the novel draws attention to its own "literariness" and its ability therein to "impart the sensation of things"³⁴ by making them "strange" through their fictional conscription. Mikhail Bahktin, too, pointed out that the novel is not a spectacle organised around Jamesian sight lines, but is a polyphony of different registers of speech and written language, a montage of "voices."

The Russian Formalist conception of the primacy of literary devices, as opposed to extra-literary effects, was endorsed by the

³³. Plato, *The Republic* (transl. Lee, H.D.P.). Penguin Books, 1955, 131.

³⁴. Bennett, Tony, *Formalism and Marxism*. Methuen: London and New York 1979.

structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure postulated the inherent arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, suggesting that the bond between language (sign) and the world (referent) is a matter of convention and agreement rather than immanent relation. What this overwhelmingly implies is that our very ability to read literature, to recognise certain discourses as literature, depends on these conventions and agreements; that there is a metaphoric "grammar" of literature which permits us to convert linguistic units into literary meaning. The recognition that literature is animated and "created" by different sets of conventions led to a new emphasis on the process by which we produce intelligible "readings" of both life and literature.³⁵ This engendered a critical move toward the construction of a theory of "narratology"; an examination of the communication process whereby the narrative as message is transmitted through the activities of selection and arrangement in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on a perceiver. The work of Kate Hamburger, Franz Stanzel, Gerard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov, Seymour Chatman and Dorrit Cohn, amongst many others, has contributed to an understanding of both the ways in which authors utilise narrative strategies, and of how we, as readers, interpret and construct these in order to produce meaning. Moving from an attempt to

³⁵. The application of Saussure's theory of signification to non-linguistic systems, such as fashion and advertising, produced analyses of media which had seemed exclusively mimetically referential and showed them as analogous to verbal language. "It is far from certain," wrote Roland Barthes, "that in the social life of today there are to be found any extensive systems of signs outside human language." (Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*. Boston 1970, 9.)

distinguish between types of the novel or modes of narration, these theorists have proposed various models of literary transmission which attempt to formulate a systematic theory of narration; that is, an analysis of the formal components which, through combination and variation, produce a narrative fiction.

Only Dorrit Cohn, however, has drawn attention to and focused upon the correlation between realistic intent and the creation of imaginary psychologies: that novelists concerned to render "reality" are also those who construct the most elaborate and artificial fictive worlds and characters in order to produce what Barthes calls *l'effet de reel*³⁶ - a "reality effect" achieved by a superfluity of detail which "confirm[s] the mimetic contract and assure[s] the reader that he can interpret the text as about a real world." (Culler, 193) Drawing upon Hamburger's *Logic of Literature*, Cohn emphasises "the importance of the mimesis of consciousness for the history of the novel" and observes that the need to convey the inner life of characters has been a recurrent preoccupation of narrative art that has tended to re-assert itself whenever the novel has become "mind-less", "whenever its characters get hyper-active, its world too cluttered, its orientation too veristic."³⁷ It is my contention that Murdoch's "real-isation" of her fictional world involves a growing attention to both the extensive presentation of the inner life and its worldly context

³⁶. quoted by Culler, Jonathan, *Structuralist Poetics*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London 1975, 193.

³⁷. Cohn, Dorrit, *Transparent Minds*. Princeton University Press 1978, 9.

and that this works paradoxically to focus attention on its highly artificial and structured nature. As Cohn attends exclusively and sensitively to the effects - realistic or otherwise - of different narrative techniques, and formulates a succinct and accurate typology for these, I have chosen to remain primarily within her theoretical framework in the next two chapters, which will examine a selection of Murdoch's third- and first-person novels in turn.

CHAPTER TWO

Lucinda can't read poetry. She's good
Sort of, at novels, though. The words, you know,
Don't sort of get in like Lucinda's way.
And then the story, well, you know, about
Real people, fall in love, like that, and all
Sort of makes you think, Lucinda thinks.

George Khairallah, "Our Latest Master of the Arts".¹

The illusion that words don't get in the way of "the story" is the fundamental premise of realism, which attempts to convey a sense of impartial observation; of communicating actions and events that exist independently of the narrative that "speaks" them. Frank Kermode cites a perfect example of compliance to this model in an essay "On Reading Novels":

The Athenaeum, reviewing [Adam Bede] when it came out, demonstrated the effect of a totally obedient reading: the reader feels 'as though he had made acquaintance with real human beings: the story is not a story, but a true account of a place and people who have really lived...that everything happened here as set down we have no doubt in the world.'
(Kermode, 118)

This illustrates neatly the fundamental self-destruct mechanism of realism; the novel's very success is measured in terms of its fictional dissolution, "leaving readers with the impression that they have not been reading but meeting people and visiting places."
(Kermode, 118)

Dorrit Cohn points to this conundrum through the title of her book - Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting

¹. Quoted by Kermode, Frank, *Essays on Fiction 1971-82*, Routledge and Kegan Paul: London 1983, 133.

Consciousness in Fiction - suggesting that transparency is in fact always an illusion that is carefully constructed by the various (and particular) means at an author's disposal. What *Transparent Minds* in fact indicates is that there is a direct correlation between the reader's presentiment of "reality" and the "artifice" of the technique (although in a sense all fictional techniques are equally "artificial"): Cohn clearly demonstrates that the most indirect and traditional mode of narration - what critics have called "omniscient narration" and she calls "psycho-narration" - is best able to portray the least conscious strata of psychic life because it can articulate unconscious depths that are "outside" of language, whereas a "stream of consciousness" technique, or "interior monologue" is by definition limited to the linguistic activity of the mind. Ironically, and contrary to the critical confusion of "disorganised" manner with unconscious matter, "the novelist who wishes to portray the least conscious strata of psychic life is forced to do so by way of the most indirect and the most traditional of the available modes" (Cohn, 56). A consideration of Murdoch's narrative modes and techniques will investigate this correlation, allowing us to assess her particular brand of realism. Rather than offering a theoretical summary as preface to a discussion of the novels, I will use an early third-person text, *The Bell* (1958) - generally felt to be Murdoch's first "characteristic" novel² - to illustrate my conceptual framework.

². A.S. Byatt describes it in *Degrees of Freedom* (Chatto and Windus: London 1970, 73) as "a novel which has the solid life that Miss Murdoch praises in the great nineteenth-century novels." Elizabeth Dipple, in *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit* (Methuen: London 1982, 242) sees the novel as revealing

In her book, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*,³ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests that the term "narration" implies a communication process whereby the narrative - practically, the book we are reading - as message, is transmitted from addresser to addressee: thus an examination of narrative techniques is a close look at the way in which certain ideas and preoccupations are conveyed to the reader. We might, for example, be aware after reading *The Bell* that Murdoch is concerned (or that we interpret her as concerned) with a moral discrimination between characters: the way in which we become aware of this is a function of those properties that inhere in narrative fictions and which, often overlooked in an analysis of character or theme, nevertheless form the basis for any such discussion. Rudimentary structural components (even in the *nouveau roman*) such as beginnings and endings, type of narration, selection of events and choices of point of view all reveal, directly or obliquely, a view of the world - even if we argue that it is not necessarily the author's own. It is through attention to formal methods that we may discover how authorial power is put to use: narrative theory indicates what choices a writer may have.

"[Murdoch's] own voice... [with] a clarity of intention its predecessors did not quite have" and marking "Murdoch's first approach to the style which [she] believe[s] will define her reputation as one of the foremost novelists writing in English in the twentieth-century."

³. Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. Methuen: London and New York 1983.

Following Genette,⁴ Rimmon-Kenan classifies the constituents of narrative fiction (that is, a novel, short story or narrative poem) as comprising "story" (the events), "text" (their verbal representation), and "narration" (the act of telling/writing). The concept of story is an abstract but useful one - the continuum of events presupposing a mythical set of all conceivable details, and its manifestation "in" the text (probably out of strictly chronological order and possibly filtered through a mediating consciousness) revealing the processes of selection and arrangement performed by the fictional discourse and articulated through the narration. In an abstract sense, then, narrative theory seeks to reveal the relationship between "story" and its textual representation.

One way of doing this is to look at the discordance between story-chronology and the disposition of events in the text. Genette terms this *anachrony*, which may be subdivided into *prolepsis* and *analepsis*; the evocation of events prior to or after their occurrence in the story. While prolepsis is not used very frequently in our narrative tradition (as it was for example in the epic tradition), analepsis constitutes a major part of many novels, particularly those that strive for realism through detailed evocation of character, setting and atmosphere. *The Bell* only progresses through one paragraph before offering an analepsis as Dora is "placed" for the reader: "She came of a lower middle-class

⁴. Genette, Gerard, *Narrative Discourse* (trans. Lewin, Jane E.). Basil Blackwell: Oxford 1986. (First published as *Discours du récit*. Editions du Seuil, 1972.)

London family..." (7). Whereas the lapse into retrospection is recurrent, but conventionally accepted as "normal" within particular codes for reading novels, prolepsis draws attention to the determining authorial voice in its single occurrence in *The Bell*: "This was one thing they were never fated to discuss" (106). Its emergence here suggests the qualities of wisdom and author-ity that are associated with the "authorial" mode, where the narrative voice offers a guide to the moral truths both within the book and in the world outside of it: where the fictional world claims to be part of the real world or its historically verifiable copy, "the authorial narrator is viewed as a guarantor of authenticity and truth of the narrative material."⁵ Although the authorial mode is reinforced in other ways that I will discuss, the proleptic self-restraint of the text suggests a desire to neutralise its effects and maintain a sense of the "transparency" of the tale.

The text thus serves up its "version" of the "story" through temporal choices among others. The story is also, however, mediated by the perspective(s) or point(s) of view that the narrative process adopts - that is, the narrative voice or voices: the choice of an overt or covert narrator, our access, or lack of it, to the consciousness of different characters, the way in which thought processes are conveyed, all clearly influence the reading process and our intuition of authorial purpose. In the context of third-person narration, Cohn identifies three modes of presentation of consciousness, which I will discuss in turn. Psycho-narration,

⁵. Stanzel, Franz, *Narrative Situations in the Novel*, Indiana University Press 1971, 41.

"the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness" (Cohn, 14), is the mode with which *The Bell* begins, making us immediately aware that the complexity of human thought and action will be an important concern in this novel: "Dora Greenfield left her husband because she was afraid of him. She decided six months later to return to him for the same reason." (7) Cohn terms this non-empathetic focus on a figural mind dissonant psycho-narration, a mode closely related to the authorial narrative voice of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novel, but which transfers the emotional and intellectual energy formerly lodged with the overt narrator to the characters. The narrating voice of the opening section is both omniscient and wise, yet impersonal; without location in a narrator-figure the bias of author-ity is again made to appear as general truth: "Dora was still very young"; "This was something she did not put clearly to herself at the time"; "How misplaced is the sympathy lavished on adolescents. There is a yet more difficult age which comes later, when one has less to hope for and less ability to change...", and so on. This voice remains distinct throughout the novel, discursive and very sure of human motivation and reaction:

Those who hope, by retiring from the world, to earn a holiday from human frailty, in themselves and others, are usually disappointed. (85)

The talk of lovers who have just declared their love is one of life's most sweet delights. Each vies with the other in humility, in amazement at being so valued. (104)

Toby had received, though not yet digested, one of the earliest lessons of adult life: that one is never secure. At any moment one can be removed from a state of guileless

serenity and plunged into its opposite, so high about us do
the waters rise of our own and other people's imperfection.
(160)

The effect of gnomic truth that Murdoch achieves here is reinforced by an alternating mode of consonant psycho-narration, where the narrating voice is further effaced through fusion with the consciousness it presents: "After he had gone Michael sat quite still in the dark. He knew in that moment that he was lost: the touch of Nick's hand had given to him a joy so intense, *he would have wished to say so pure, if the word had here not rung a little strangely*" (103; my emphasis). Here the displacement of emotional energy from narrator to character is seen at its greatest; even the act of verbalisation is given to Michael, suggesting an analogy between the fictional act and lived experience - as though one "narrates" one's life to oneself - that further reinforces the illusion of transparency.

In this last example, the narrative voice tells us what Michael "would have wished to say", but retains the ability to speak for him. The citation of a character's own thoughts and inner voice seems only to have become a fully established technique around the middle of the nineteenth century (Cohn, 58), the heroes and heroines of earlier novels monologising only on exceptional occasions, after elaborate authorial introductions and in clearly audible fashion; "he cried," "she exclaimed," and so on. The growing interest in individual psychology at the end of the nineteenth century is likely to have influenced the Realist novel's frequent usage of this inner voice in tandem with the protagonists

"real" experiences and encounters, rather than in moments set aside for contemplation and debate. Cohn points out that the novel which perhaps brought about the most radical change in the integration of quoted monologue - as she calls "a character's mental discourse" (Cohn, 14) - with the surrounding text is James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Here for the first time, the inner discourse is no longer separated from its third-person context by introductory phrases or graphic signs of any kind, although changes in tense and "person" do act as grammatical signs.

In whichever way an inner voice is presented, however, the monologist's content is always subordinated to the context of the utterance; our evaluation of what he/she says to him/herself always remains tied to the perspective created by the narrative voice (if it is not tied to any such perspective, it becomes a first-person genre which we know as "interior monologue".)⁶ In Chapter 12 of *The Bell*, Toby's thoughts of fear and repugnance after Michael has kissed him are qualified by authorial pronunciation - "like all inexperienced people, Toby tended to make all-or-nothing judgements" (161) - drawing our attention to the naivety of the figural consciousness on display. Less obviously directive but again indicative of how to "read" the quoted monologue, is the narrative information given after Dora's thoughts on the train in the opening chapter:

⁶. This is not to confuse our evaluation of the "speaking" character with the readerly reconstruction of the "implied author" that Wayne Booth discusses in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*; a concept that is liable to critical misuse and serves little exegetic purpose.

Dora stopped listening because a dreadful thought had struck her. She ought to give up her seat. She rejected the thought, but it came back. *There was no doubt about it....* She sat still and considered the matter. *There was no point in being hasty....The old lady would be perfectly all right in the corridor.* The corridor was full of old ladies anyway, and no one else seemed bothered by this, least of all the old ladies themselves! Dora hated pointless sacrifices....She decided not to give up her seat.

She got up and said to the standing lady "Do sit down here please. I'm not going very far, and I'd much rather stand anyway. (16-17; my emphases)

This presentation of quoted monologue as thoughts deliberately articulated in the service of conscious rationalisation is one way of utilising the unease over the very concept of mental language; in fact it suggests that we only think in this "self-conscious" manner when trying to avoid the promptings of the unconscious. Whether we really think in words is a thorny psycho-linguistic problem which both authors and readers may sense intuitively. This would explain the elaborate prefiguring of the emotional condition that necessitates "thinking aloud" in pre-realist novels that do not take an inner voice for granted,⁷ the ironic usage of the mode as seen above, and the qualifications that often gloss a quoted monologue, suggesting that it is an authorial transcript of inchoate figural thoughts which may be composed of other "mind stuff"⁸ as well as language:

Dora was always moved by the pictures. Today she was moved, but in a new way....It occurred to her that here at last was something real and something perfect. Who had said that, about perfection and reality being in the same place? Here was something her consciousness could not wretchedly devour,

⁷. A point made by Cohn, who cites examples from *Tom Jones* and *Wilhelm Meister*.

⁸. William James's phrase, cited by Cohn, 78.

and by making it part of her fantasy make it worthless. Even Paul, she thought, only existed now as someone she dreamt about or else as a vague external menace never really encountered and understood....When the world had seemed to be subjective it had seemed to be without interest or value. But now there was something else in it after all.

These thoughts, not clearly articulated, flitted through Dora's mind. She had never thought about the pictures in this way before; nor did she now draw any explicit moral. Yet she felt that she had a revelation. (190-1; my emphasis)

Dissonant psycho-narration takes care to acknowledge the unlikeliness of such "clearly articulated" insight, but the usage of quoted monologue has ensured that we at least draw some kind of moral from the incident.

The directly linguistic presentation of thought processes is clearly problematic in many ways, despite the evolution of narrative technique from obligatory inquit phrases ("he said to himself") to a potential Joycean stream of consciousness. Indeed, in both passages that I have used to discuss this technique, it is used in conjunction with a third narrative mode which mediates between the knowing external perspective of psycho-narration and the directness of quoted monologue to create an effect of indeterminacy with regard to the *consciousness* of expression. This is achieved by using the same tense for the narrator's reporting language and the characters reflecting language and is thus termed by Cohn narrated monologue, "a name that suggests its position astride narration and quotation" (Cohn, 14):

Toby was rather disappointed to discover that the community had women members. That, somehow, was not quite right. Still, everyone appeared to be extremely nice, except that Dr Greenfield man was a trifle rebarbative. (This was a word which Toby had recently learnt at school and now could not conceive of doing without.) (48)

Toby neither "says" nor "thinks" this, yet we are aware that his consciousness has appropriated the narrative, as it were; even the opening sentence of psycho-narration is "coloured" (through "rather") by the figural idiom which prevails in the next two, clearly evoking the sensation of unformulated thought ("That, somehow, was not quite right") and initial impressions ("that Dr Greenfield man".) In fact, the narrative commentary makes explicit here the internally focalized⁹ perspective of the previous sentences; indeed, "authorises" Toby's use of a word that we might feel to be outside of his vocabulary. Usually, however, the relationship between words and thoughts is left latent, the figural consciousness suspended on the threshold of verbalisation in a way that could not be achieved by direct quotation or narrative commentary:

The good weather was holding. How very large and peaceful the scene was outside. Michael rested his eyes upon it with relief....The lake was a brilliant yet gentle colour of which it was *hard to say* whether it was light blue or an extremely luminous grey. A slight warm breeze took the edge off the heat. To the left along the drive Paul and Dora Greenfield could be seen returning from their walk. (97; my emphasis)

The point of the technique is, of course, that Michael's simultaneous impressions of the lake's colour are conveyed without either the narrating voice or character having "to say."

By blurring the immediacy of quotation and the mediacy of narration, narrated monologue clearly makes itself the province of

⁹. Rimmon-Kenan, following Genette, uses the term "focalization" as a substitute for "point of view", arguing that the latter does not make the crucial distinction between "who speaks?" and "who sees?"

subtlety and ambiguity: the casting of a subjective mind into the grammar of objective narration often demonstrates the mendacity inherent in a character's formulation of inchoate feelings, the fending off of disturbing truths by the conscious mind:

On a piece of straight road he ventured to look down at Toby. The boy was curled against him, his legs drawn up, his hands touchingly folded, his head lying now between Michael's shoulder and the back of the seat. The white laundered shirt hung open almost to his waist. As Michael looked at him, and then returned his gaze to the road, he had a very distinct impulse to thrust his hand into the front of Toby's shirt ...Michael felt a deep need to build, to retain, his friendship with Toby; there was no reason why such a friendship should not be fruitful for both of them; and he felt a serene confidence in his own most scrupulous discretion. (156)

Psycho-narration makes explicit here the sexual attraction implicit in the prior physical description ("he had a very distinct impulse to thrust his hand into the front of Toby's shirt"), whose selective details are clearly of Michael's perception - but his own formulation of this emotion succeeds in sublimating and rendering more neutral these deeper feelings about Toby: "there was no reason why such a friendship should not be fruitful for both of them." Almost immediately after this he kisses the boy, and is retrospectively "stunned" by his action: we, however, have had sufficient indication through these discrepancies to be less surprised.

Because narrated monologue can both amplify emotional notes and throw the figural mind into ironic relief, it is peculiarly dependent on the narrative voice that surrounds and mediates it: in the proximity of the dissonant psycho-narration that

characterises the authorial mode of *The Bell*, narrated monologue tends to counterpoint (as we have seen above) inadequate character-assessment of self or situation with implicit or explicit narratorial information. We identify with and follow Michael's inner struggle most closely, since it is in conjunction with the presentation of his consciousness that narrated monologue is most often used. At the same time, however, the emergence of his "own" voice tends to reinforce our sense of him as trapped within his own "character": from the first instance - couched in the furtherly subjective context of a dream - we are aware of the concentration of self on past guilt, and of his inability to escape from its pernicious hold. Paradoxically the in-sight draws our attention to the (con)text: Nick, for example, is only seen through Michael's reflections on the past events that connect them, and our awareness of this lack of "perspective", of attention to the adult Nick in the Imber community, prefigures Michael's realisation of the dangerous limitations of this kind of introspection after Nick's suicide. This tension between identification and distance is created and maintained by the synthesis that narrated monologue achieves between "objective" (in this case) authorial narration, and subjective figural evocation.

The sense of an external authorial focus at work in the novel, despite a fairly extensive use of narrated monologue, is reinforced by "producing" the "story" through the consciousnesses of Dora and Toby, as well as Michael. Although our sense is usually that of moving through their thoughts and emotions with them as events unfold, Murdoch chiefly employs psycho-narration; the narrative

voice tells us about these thoughts and emotions, often modulating briefly into narrated monologue in the course of such commentary. As such, we are never fully immersed in any one character's consciousness, but retain the narratorial perspective, absorbing the characters' appraisals of one another, often aware of circumstances that they do not know. The meeting between Toby and Dora in Chapter Fifteen, for instance, is given additional resonance by our awareness of Toby's recent incarnation of her as an image of female desirability, and of the reasons for this. Our sympathy for the three mediating characters rests on this awareness of the "whole story", and the sense the partial views convey to us of the human struggle to "see" people and events correctly.

That there is never a "whole story", but always a "narrative" of events is of course part of the point: by the end of the novel, the narrative voice has withdrawn from the characters, explicitly summing up events in a detached and analytic fashion, but suddenly shifts into Michael's consciousness in an analeptic exploration of his reaction to Nick's death. "Objective" events are transformed into a highly personalised "version" as Michael explores their implications for himself whilst aware that this is precisely what he had done with the earlier events that related to Nick. The narrative withdrawal from Toby and Dora signals the end of their "story" - at least for us - and this is made explicit by the text: Toby writes from Oxford, where "already Imber had become a story" (306), and Dora thinks in the last line of the novel that "Tonight she would be telling the story to Sally." (317) Only Michael is left "unresolved", without a story, suffering and indeterminate,

his isolation confirmed by Dora's misapprehension of his feelings for Catherine. Thus does Murdoch satisfy the demand of the realistic novel for both a satisfying story and a sense that life is not like a satisfying story - while of course making the paradoxical point that life *is* like that in so far as people do try to order and shape their experience, often to the detriment of real perception of that experience.

The Bell is one of Murdoch's most critically acclaimed novels, praised for achieving a fine balance between the elaborate plotting and patterning that characterises her writing, and a sympathetic, "religious" and moral approach that is seen as compatible with her stated desire to work in the tradition of the great Realist writers. An examination of the narrative techniques of the novel has shown that this is achieved through the juxtaposition of an authoritative, omniscient narrative voice, calling up a concrete and knowable world populated by recognisable characters, and an inner perspective that reveals the subjective nature of "telling the story" and the essential isolation of the individual. This balance of two essentially opposing modes of fiction, authorial and figural, demonstrates a masterly appropriation of the twentieth-century concern with individual psychology - our notion of "realism" - to a traditional narrative mode which subliminally reassures by retaining control. The effect of tones from different eras corresponds to the two quite different cultural styles in the novel; the sense of incongruity we feel in the explicit connection of a 1950s present (exemplified by Dora) and a nineteenth-century past (Imber, both as a house and as a religious community: that

there is no real sustaining religious or social background for the characters is made clear by the precarious nature of the Imber world - the chapel in the drawing-room, Patchway's respect for Michael as owner rather than as spiritual leader.) The interplay of an authorial, morally prescriptive narrative voice and the subjective, almost existential sense of relativity that emerges through the mediating perspectives emphasises the characters' tenuous connection with a bygone cultural and social order; reveals them as vulnerably separate from it, while reaffirming our "belongingness" through our ability to "read" these implications.

The Bell has, as Peter Conradi puts it, "been claimed for 'realism'"¹⁰ and perhaps not coincidentally as "the clearest foreshadowing of Murdoch's real style, the one she was to choose from her several possibilities" (Dipple, 135). "Real style" can perhaps be read in two ways here; Dipple is ostensibly alluding, one presumes, to Murdoch's later novels, but also indicating that their "style" partakes of and reproduces "reality" in a way that, again presumably, some of the earlier novels do not. Read in this way, the comment offers an oblique acknowledgement of Murdoch's "un-real style", and indeed, Dipple goes on to divide the pre-1968 (the year in which *The Nice and the Good* was published) novels into three dominant categories; the "novel of tricks", the

¹⁰. Conradi, Peter, *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*. Macmillan 1986, 113.

"ruminative novel", and the "religious novel", with "ruminative" slotting into critical first place. An examination of *The Bell*'s narrative techniques has, I hope, demonstrated Murdoch's achievement in successfully combining an authoritative comedic plotting and complexity of theme with a subjective and emotive depth, and it is certainly true that she thereby succeeds in synthesising features of her writing that tend to dominate singly in *The Bell*'s predecessors. It is precisely in this synthesis, however, that the strength of the novel lies; all three "categories" are, as it were, combined, as they will be in the best of Murdoch's mature fiction. To suggest, as Dipple does here, that Murdoch's "real style" is found in the ruminative novel, which is "characterised by deepening of character", is to leave out of account the way in which the comedic, the "romantic" and the gothic (by no means an exclusive list) inform and enrich her work and constitute her own distinctive "style-of-the-real". An examination of the other "possibilities" will be useful in considering both how these elements are put to work locally and in the context of her oeuvre, and to this end I will now consider an apparently very different early novel, *The Unicorn* (1963).

Both *The Bell* and *The Unicorn* review the value and the necessity of spiritual aspiration and interrogate the relationship between religion and enchantment. "Human beings are essentially finders of substitutes," says Julius King in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), and the titles of both these novels points to the central need of the characters to create symbolic meaning and order in their lives through the imaginative sublimation of both objects and

other people to their own ends. Like "the bell", the point about the unicorn symbol is that it is empty, its attributes bestowed upon it by the characters rather than the author in an act analogous to the critical task of finding the novel's "centre", or "meaning". Both novels, too, are situated in the remote enclosure of romance and concern events in two discrete but connected houses (Imber, the Abbey; Gaze and Riders), and in both the present is held tragically in thrall by the past. Structurally and generically, however, they exemplify very different approaches to thematically similar materials: whereas the rural setting and recognisable religious community of *The Bell* call upon, as earlier discussed, the whole tradition of the realistic novel, *The Unicorn* utilises a stylised gothic mode and makes striking use of its atmospheric trappings.

The novel is set "in a prototypical 'horrid' province of European Romanticism" (Conradi, 122), in an "appalling" landscape that is both intractable and pointedly hostile; the sea kills, the bog - in itself an image of the dark unknown - floods at seven-year intervals, the very plants are "carnivorous". The self-conscious significance of the landscape is both like and more artificial than it is in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, both part of the romantic, metaphoric "myth" that Murdoch is using and also the metonymic signifier of a finally irreducible, unassimilable reality that resists the "attempt...to put the text back into the total

context from which it derives".¹¹ This resistance is perhaps part of our perception of the novel as "unrealistic", and is part of Murdoch's attempt to show us the "power of our inherited collective view of the world"¹² which can exclude both its beauty and its horror. Paradoxically, the visual and tonal stylisation of the gothic mode becomes the means by which we are made to pay attention to the "real" world, to all that the self cannot tame or make sense of.

Murdoch discusses the expansion of the blinkered enclosed self in confrontation with the world's particulars in her philosophical writings as the "sublime"; "a realisation of a vast and varied reality outside ourselves which brings about a sense initially of terror and when properly understood, of exhilaration and spiritual power" (*SBR*, 268). This attribution of value to the failure to understand opposes Sartre's "nausea" at the contingent unstable nature of the world by setting apprehension against explanation: our inability to "write" the world, to name all, becomes a spur to the attempt to "read" it with due attention and care even while knowing the futility of a quest for totality. The clash between mind and world, between the form-making imagination and the formless, become here a cause for celebration in much the same way that post-structuralist criticism celebrates aporia and

¹¹. Lodge, David, *The Modes of Modern Writing*. Edward Arnold: London 1977, 93. My opposition of metaphor and metonymy is taken from Lodge's detailed discussion of these terms.

¹². Murdoch, Iris, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited", *Yale Review*, XLIX, Winter 1959, 264. All further references to this article will be abbreviated as "*SBR*".

"difference". In a recent introduction to deconstructive criticism, Vincent B. Leitch notes that "To construct a narrative of experience is to produce fissures in that experience. Criticism is such a perpetual displacement from that immediacy".¹³ The gothic, then, is used in *The Unicorn* as a "significantly" artificial and closed form, pointing to the alliance between story and enchantment and then to the schism between fiction and reality: "real" fiction (that we read) stands in here for our inevitable fictionalising of our lives, our inability to realise "a vast and varied reality outside ourselves".

Like *The Bell*, *The Unicorn* is written in the third person and mediated through the consciousness of selected characters. In keeping with its narrower, more subjective world, however, there are only two centres of consciousness who remain consistently external to and alienated from the gothic character of the "story", and the calmly assured "placing" authorial voice has almost entirely withdrawn. Written in seven parts, like the seven-year cycle of events it recounts, the narrative alternates between the perspective of Marian Taylor, who has accepted the post of governess at Gaze Castle, but finds her "pupil" to be the fey, enigmatic mistress of the house, Hannah Crean-Smith,¹⁴ and that of Effingham Cooper, a frequent guest at the neighbouring house, Riders, who complacently worships Hannah from afar. Both Marian

¹³. Leitch, Vincent B., *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*. Hutchinson, 58.

¹⁴. Robert Scholes has pointed out that this is an anagram of Christ-mean or Christ-name in his essay on *The Unicorn*, in *Fabulation and Metafiction*. London 1979.

and Effingham belong to the quotidian, "secular" world in a way that the other characters - the beautiful imprisoned Hannah, the menacing Gerald Scottow, the eerie Violet Evercreech, silent Denis Nolan - do not, and both attempt to "read" the other characters in terms of this quotidian "reality"; to "explain away" the mysterious situation that they find at Gaze. In this attempt to assimilate and subliminate the gothic, they become surrogates for the reader, who must however, in turn, "read" Marion and Effingham through the imaginative inferences they make about the events they perceive. Murdoch's accomplishment here is to suggest through her narrative techniques that a *psychomachia* (Dipple, 267) is being carried on in which the two outsiders undergo the ordeals of the "story" and are forced - at least for its duration - through an instructive enchantment/disenchantment that acts as a ritual passage back to the realm of the limited and the ordinary. That is, despite their retention of narrative perspective, we are made to see how the story acts upon them, as well as how they are able - or unable - to interpret it.

The Unicorn opens, like many other Murdoch novels, with a dialogue that inserts us into the "story". The identity of the speakers, narratorial perspective and circumstances are all initially ambiguous, becoming only slightly less so as the narrative point of view is located with the anonymous "she". This linkage of subjectivity and anonymity subtly suggests both the literary archetypality of the situation - a lone woman in an alien "uncivilised" place - and that this will be "her" story in so far as "she" will be "named", or learn to define herself more clearly.

In other words, we are alerted in the opening pages to the use of opposing literary codes; Marian is both a Jane Eyre-like "literary" figure, a gothic governess already "written" by Henry James in "The Turn of the Screw", and a "realistic" character whose passage through the story will be in some sense a model of the reader's own. Through her we meet and receive impressions about the other characters, while "reading" her both through these impressions and her own ruminations about herself and her past. Both of these are predominantly conveyed through consonant psycho-narration, where little disparity is evident between the narrating and the figural consciousness:

Marian now saw that Mrs Crean-Smith was barefoot. This observation at once defined the yellow robe as a dressing-gown; and with this there came to her a general sense of something very slightly unkempt, the hair a little tousled, the finger-nails not quite clean, the lovely face a little tired, a little sallow and greasy, like that of a person long ill. Marian wondered at once whether Mrs Crean-Smith were not in fact somehow ill, and she had a guilty little feeling of revulsion. Yet she felt too relief and immediate liking. This person was harmless. (30)

Despite the reportorial mode of observation and description, the perception here is clearly Marian's as an omniscient comment ("there came to her a general sense...") is followed by a listing of physical details that conveys the sense of the *process* of observation. The subjectivity of impression is further underlined by the intertwining of thoughts and feelings in the next two sentences, leading to the final thought: "This person was harmless". Marian has good cause later to revise this opinion, and even at this point the gothic "markers" (which Marian too is responding to in her very need to reassure herself that Hannah's

"oddness" is in no way sinister) - the landscape, the anomalous characters, the sense of enclosure, of Gaze as a "prison" - suggest its possible inaccuracy and indicate that the judgement is Marian's alone. That Marian's own need to rationalise her surroundings might be paramount is suggested by the way in which narrated monologue here borders on quoted monologue: this last sentence is clearly a character's mental discourse cast into the grammar of objective narration - that is, narrated monologue - but the temporal immediacy of the perception (despite, paradoxically, the past tense) indicates a semi-conscious articulation, necessary perhaps to suppress the unease that Marian - and we - unconsciously feel. The combination of psycho-narration and narrated monologue that we see in this passage is, as we saw in *The Bell*, particularly effective in exposing the efficiency of the conscious mind's ability to neutralise disturbing feelings through the action of verbalisation.

The obviously subjective nature of these narrated impressions is in keeping with Marian's clearly defined role - both in the novel and for the reader - as an outsider who must piece together the (con)text in which she finds herself. It also serves, however, to prefigure the consistent act of interpretation required by the "tale" of Hannah "within" the novel; an act faithfully performed by almost all of the characters who construe different accounts of her calm acceptance of immurement by her absent husband Peter, for her "crimes" of adultery and for his accident at the cliff edge. All accounts of Hannah and of the "situation" at Gaze are partial and subjective ones, and the absence of a dissonant and omniscient

narrating voice suggests that there is no central truth to be found; that Hannah, like the unicorn, is a talismanic object on to which the other characters bring all the force of their symbol-making powers. In the last chapter of Part One (significantly divided into seven chapters?), Marian learns the facts about Hannah's past from Denis, who loves and serves her with deliberately unquestioning devotion, and reacts immediately by perceiving these as part of a plotted sequence of events:

Why have I come?" said Marian. Her own place in the story occurred to her for the first time. The ghastly tale had become a reality all about her, it was still going on. And it was a tale in which nothing happened at random.

....A prophetic flash of understanding burnt her with a terrible warmth. That was what she was for; she was for Gerald Scottow: his adversary, his opposite angel. By wrestling with Scottow she would make her way into the story. (75-6)

The compelling power of "the story" seduces Marian, like nearly all the other characters, into an act of interpretation that foregrounds her *own* role, an act tempting and satisfying because it confers identity and form upon the self. Unable to resist having "her own place in the story", the alien world of romance is transmuted into "reality", parodying her resolution upon arrival at Gaze: "Well, whatever here there was, she would take it with her full and devoted attention. Perhaps the era of realism was beginning." (23) Marian's activity here allegorises the reader's own in the attempt to understand the significance of events, ironically underlining the gothic ("the ghastly tale....in which nothing happened at random") while attempting its assimilation.

Leaving Marian to "make her way into the story", the narrative perspective shifts to Effingham Cooper who is already part of it, and for whom we have been prepared by several references. Denis tells Marian that he "is a harmless man"(75), and both his pomposity and underlying sense of inadequacy are subtly communicated in the opening paragraphs of Part Two as he examines himself in the railway carriage mirror:

He looked like a man; and he certainly passed, in the society which he frequented, as a clever successful enviable one. As he lifted his chin pensively to his image he recalled that Elizabeth, who was the only person who dared to mock him, had once said that his favourite expression was one of 'slumbrous power'. He smiled ruefully at himself and sat down. (82)

The use of narrated monologue here skilfully counterbalances Effingham's need for reassurance through self-definition ("He looked like a man") against the narrative implication that this definition is a fraudulent one, measured against the social standards of a milieu in which he has already "passed" as "manly". The ambiguity of "voice" that narrated monologue sustains suggests his own sense of inauthenticity, but also, in the next lines, his pleasure in this "insight" and in toying with alternative persona. We are immediately alerted to his need to play a part, made explicit by the analeptic recounting of his falling in love with Hannah: after hearing "the outline of the story" (84) on a visit to Riders, he becomes "obsessed" by her, eventually meeting her when forced by a storm to take refuge at Gaze.

No space-man about to step into his rocket was more meticulously fitted to go into orbit than Effingham at that moment was ready to fall in love with Hannah....He had supposed that the clever Elizabeth was the great love of his

life. But the odd spiritual tormented yet resigned beauty of Hannah seemed to him now the castle perilous toward which he had now all his days been faring. (85-6)

The chauvinism implicit in the valuation of "manliness", and which is later evidenced by his inability to treat women as equals, predisposes Effingham to inhabit a situation that he perceives as having "all the qualities of a wonderful story" (88); a medieval romance complete with a quest and a symbolic and necessarily unattainable Holy Grail, as opposed to Marian's Gothic "ghastly tale".

That the construction of such "fictions" sets up expectations and preconceptions that blur the perception of "reality" is both part of the message and the process in which the reader is involved: Hannah becomes increasingly incomprehensible to the other characters because, like us, they are unable to see her other than in the terms of their own interpretations. Hannah herself is aware of this: "I'm a story for you, we remain on romantic terms" (108), she tells Effingham. Our dissatisfaction with Hannah as a "realistic" character is part of our intuition of her as an "absent centre" (Conradi, 123), as somehow less than the symbol that the other characters - and we - wish to make of her, yet available only "on romantic terms". In an important discussion of Hannah's "meaning" that parallels the one between Marian and Denis, Max Lejour offers an interpretation that attempts to take this into account:

"In a way we can't help using her as a scapegoat. In a way that's what she's for and to recognise it is to do her honour.

She is our image of the significance of suffering. But we must also see her as real. And that will make us suffer too."

"I'm not sure that I understand," said Effingham. "I know one mustn't think of her as a legendary creature, a beautiful unicorn--"

"The unicorn is also the image of Christ. But we have to do too with an ordinary guilty person." (115)

Max goes on to suggest that she may be "a pure being who only suffers and does not attempt to pass the suffering on" (116), but recognises that this may just be his "own form...of romanticism". The effort to see Hannah as "an ordinary guilty person" proves, whether Murdoch intends this or not, to be well nigh impossible - only Alice sounds a prosaic note when she tells Effingham "I don't dislike her, one couldn't, but we just don't get on" (90) - and this is compounded by the range of romantic truism and device that is bestowed upon her and which subtly suggests her complicity in the creation of fantasy. "Hannah makes romantics of us all" (93), Effingham tells Alice, and on apprehending Marian as "uncorrupted" (101), asks himself "Were the rest of them corrupted then?" The implication here seems to be that Hannah's spirituality does not possess the value accorded by the characters, that the "theories" of redemptive suffering,¹⁵ of aspiration toward the good, are in fact her own fantasies, imposed upon reality by her will and unconscious needs, and by the concomitant needs of those around her.

Part Three reverts to Marian's point of view, opening with a letter to her from Geoffry, with whom she has been unreciprocatedly

¹⁵. A.S. Byatt points out that this idea derives from the thought of Simone Weil and suggests that it is "our touchstone for the religious validity of Hannah's suffering" (161).

in love and from whom she has escaped to Gaze. Its' breezy tone is in sharp contrast to the last chapter of Part Two, in which Marian tries to persuade Effingham that they should abduct Hannah in order to "make her realise that she is free" (139), and we may measure the extent of Marian's and our "corruption" or investment in "the story" by the sense of how alien this reminder of the "external" world feels. Her primary energies at this point, however, are devoted to retaining a grip on this world and its' values of personal liberty and individual choice: "She felt above all, as a sort of categorical imperative, the desire to set Hannah free, to smash up all her eerie magical surroundings, to let the fresh air in at last; even if the result should be some dreadful suffering" (147). The tension between the worlds of realism and romance is evident in the vocabulary, confusions and contradictions of this statement, in which narrated monologue edges close to quoted monologue. As Robert Scholes notes, "that Kant phrase of modern morality, the categorical imperative...[is] an attempt to generate an absolute and systematic morality without justification from the invisible world" (70); and it's ready usage here points to its (literal) part in Marian's vocabulary of morality even as the remainder of the statement conveys her sense of the frightening, incomprehensible terrain of "the invisible world" through it's vehement and vague language.

The process of corruption, of habitation of the "ghastly tale", is exacerbated by the oddness of Marian's talk to the (rather self-consciously) weird Violet Evercreech that follows this self-communion, and the discovery of the liaison between Gerald and

Jamesie, but the end of the chapter sees Marian denying Denis's assertion that "Everyone here is involved in guilt": "'Except me,' said Marian half to herself after a moment. 'Except me, except me, except me'" (157). The momentum and suspense of Part Three, in which the "rescue" of Hannah is attempted and fails, acts, however, as an analogue of Marian's capitulation to the complicity she is finally forced to admit in significantly romantic and gothic language: "She had been taken to some place of ultimate surrender, and she had given in without a moan" (182). We too "give in" to "the pattern" (182), giving up any notion of an objective "truth" about matters as the narrative perspective shuttles between Marian and Effingham in the last four, steadily shortening parts of the novel, and the folkloric superstition that something apocalyptic will happen after seven years seems magically to come true. The plot proliferates as the literary conventions of the thriller and the gothic novel are heaped upon one another; Effingham almost drowns in the bog and is saved just in time, Peter's imminent return is announced, causing widespread hysteria, Gerald seduces an apparently willing Hannah and declares his intention of taking her away, nature erupts, murder and suicide follow with startling rapidity; to mention just some of the turns of the screw.

The novel thus highlights its own excesses, drawing our attention to the ease with which we are lured into a fictional world that we perceive as "unrealistic" by allowing us to retain the vantage points that enable this perception. The mediation of narrative through the liberal, utilitarian world-views of Marian and Effingham demonstrates the process by which they, and we, are

seduced into the Romanticism that Conradi describes as "the apocalyptic yearning for redemption" (121); our desire for structure, resolution, a "story". The world of realism, in which reason "sees", is shown to be inadequate to the symbolic externalisation of psychic forces that "the story" enacts, yet so, by implication, is the surrender to the world of gothic romance. In the single moment of real spiritual enlightenment in the novel, as he faces death in the bog, Effingham perceives the world without the supporting structures of a "mythology", and experiences a sublime release from the burden of his own self-consciousness. This moral ascesis is believably momentary, however, and fades from his awareness as he returns ineluctably to the ordinary world of fantasy and egotism, or "reality". That this world is paradoxically one of self-satisfying fictions is evident in Effingham's analysis of events as he departs for London:

It had been a fantasy of the spiritual life, a story, a tragedy. Only the spiritual life has no story and is not tragic. Hannah had been for them an image of God; and if she was a false God they had certainly worked hard to make her so. He thought of her now as a doomed figure, a Lilith, a pale death-dealing enchantress: anything but a human being. (317)

The worlds of realism and romance are, in this way, shown as equally delusive conditions; the real-ising of romance and the romancing of the real are both evident in this passage, and both result in distortion and falsification. The novel, then, sustains a debate about exactly the problems and excesses that it appears to "suffer"; in a broad sense it is *about* the Romantic and Gothic power of the imagination to construct the private drama in which we are always immersed and which colours all that we see, and it

suggests this through the externalisation of a "real"-unreal Romantic and Gothic drama. Through its' almost exclusively figural narrative, *The Unicorn* suggests the strivings of the imagination to reconcile the disjunction between mind and world, and presents itself in the service of such a (dis)enchanted enterprise.

In a 1968 interview, Murdoch describes her work as alternating "between a sort of closed novel, where my own obsessional feeling about the novel is very strong and draws it together, and an open novel, where there are more accidental and separate and free characters."¹⁶ Although Murdoch has argued for the centrality of naturalistic character and written about the ways in which too great an attention to the form of the novel can detract from the illusion that the characters are free,¹⁷ she does not suggest that these two aspects are irreconcilable; indeed, her point is the necessity and the difficulty of this reconciliation: "Ideally, and if one were a great writer, one could, I think, combine both these things in a single work and not have to oscillate between them."¹⁸ It is not, then, merely a matter of resisting "a tendency too readily to pull a form or a structure out of something one's

¹⁶. Rose, W.K., "Iris Murdoch, Informally", *London Magazine*, June 1968, 59-73.

¹⁷. See "Against Dryness", referred to in Chapter One, and "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited", cited in note 12.

¹⁸. Anon, "Mainly about Authors", *Bookman*, November 1958, 26.

thinking about and to rest upon that",¹⁹ but also of knowing that "the mythical is not some thing "extra": we live in myth and symbol all the time".²⁰

The Unicorn and *The Bell* might be seen as two sides of the Murdochian coin, evidence of the conflict between the author's desire to create "free", realistic characters, and her belief that human beings are essentially trapped by their own mythological structures. Part of my point in examining the techniques of these two novels has been to show the relationship between form and effect to be less simple than one might expect: the sense of "openness" in *The Bell* is created by an omniscient authorial voice who retains control over a familiar, knowable world, while the "closed" claustrophobic "feel" of *The Unicorn* is partially the result of "reading" it through two deliberately subjective and incomplete points of view. In equal but opposite ways, both urge on us - as do many of the early novels - a sense of the world's multiplicity and mystery (*The Bell* through "objectivity", *The Unicorn* through "subjectivity") which they cannot yet adequately enact. The publication of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970) marks a new phase in her career in which she is often able to achieve a synthesis of these two modes: in this novel, the structure is allegorical, but functions in an enabling rather than a determining manner. I would like, however, to conclude this chapter by looking at the next novel, *An Accidental Man* (1971), where it seems to me

¹⁹. Kermode, Frank, "The House of Fiction", *The Novel Today*, 113.

²⁰. Murdoch, Iris, "Mass, Might and Myth", *Spectator*, CCIX, 7 September 1962, 338.

that Murdoch achieves notable success in the mediation between strongly imagined, "free" character, and the "myth" embodied in the plot; and that she does this through the transmutation of an omniscient narrating voice into multiple perspectives while preventing a subjective, figural "take-over" of the story through the use of other formal devices.

In her early essays and interviews, Murdoch points to the temptation for the author to articulate different aspects of the self through the characters, who are then set to work, as it were, for their creator's salvation:

One starts off hoping...that a lot of people who are not me are going to come into existence in some wonderful way. Yet often it turns out in the end that something about the structure of the work itself, the myth as it were of the work, has drawn all these people into a sort of a spiral, or into a kind of form which ultimately is the form of one's own mind. (Kermode, 114)

In the 1968 Rose interview, Murdoch notes that "if I could have a novel which was made up entirely of peripheral characters, accidental people like Dickens' people, this would be a very much better novel", and in a BBC interview after the publication of *An Accidental Man*, she refers to the book as "a deliberate attempt to exclude the central nucleus and to have a lot of different attachments pulling the plot and the interest away into further corners".²¹ The title of the novel points to the paradox inherent in this attempt to reconcile the form of the novel and the apparent contingency of the characters. Perhaps the single greatest

²¹. Quoted by Todd, Richard, *Iris Murdoch: The Shakespearean Interest*. Barnes and Noble: New York 1979, 48.

convention of written literature, the title is, as Michel Foucault has noted,²² part of the "template" used by a reader in order to generate meaning: functioning as a boundary around a text which separates it from all the other texts in the author's oeuvre - much as the name of a text's author functions to separate that oeuvre from the other components of what Foucault calls "the general text" - the reader is pre-disposed toward a particular "reading". Here, the conflation of indefinite article and particular character indicate both the "sense in which Austin [the eponymous "hero"] is to be regarded as representative of everybody" (Todd, 45), and as part of a careful structure of pattern and ideas.

Murdoch's activity in generating a character exemplifying through random chaotic development the notion of unintentionality paradoxically necessitates a proliferation of technical devices; in order to "free" Austin from apparent authorial control, Murdoch deflects the reader from the apparent centre that the title provides by concentrating her obvious formal attention at the "peripheries". The novel is thus remarkably successful in evoking both the sense of a centre around Austin that is necessary to a "realistic" tale, and a "meta-realistic" context in which the activities of centralising and marginalising events are shown as pursuits of authors, characters and readers. In a sense, *An Accidental Man* makes "real" (that is, fictional) the allegory of artistic manipulation that its predecessor enacts: unlike the

²². Foucault, Michel, "What is an Author?", in Harari, Josue (ed.), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca 1979.

devilishly cynical and organised Julius King of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Austin is without plan or intent, entirely "accidental", although almost equally destructive. Intentionality as a *theme* has been transmuted here into the content of the novel - that is, the characters feel themselves to possess intentions - but is seemingly removed from the formal structure that contains them. A closer look at the narrative techniques employed in the novel will reveal the way in which this balance is achieved.

An Accidental Man is written in the third-person, but presented largely through dialogue, narrated monologue, letters and choral party scenes, without formal chapter divisions. The authorial voice makes way almost exclusively here for the figural consciousness, and the effect of these multiple points of view is almost to suggest a polyphonous first-person text. An absence of the moral "stance" that characterises nineteenth-century realist novels is made palpable by this polyphony, which oddly suggests an "objectivity" about the spiritual decay and mediocrity of its "intentional" characters while simultaneously recounting Austin's "undeserved" and accidental transformation from a self-tortured demonic bungler into a comparatively happy man. In *On Deconstruction*, Jonathan Culler discusses literary meaning as "produced by a process of grafting", a model offered by Jacques Derrida for thinking about the "logic" of texts; "a logic that combines graphic operations with processes of insertion and

strategies for proliferation".²³ In *An Accidental Man*, three principal techniques might be seen as grafted together in order to produce a work in which the ambiguities of form and an apprehension of the real battle fruitfully against one another: these are "scenes", epistolary sequences and dramaturgical episodes.

Like many Murdoch novels, *An Accidental Man* starts with a dialogue that enacts a *fait accompli* which it then "freezes" while an explanatory account of how the characters have reached this point is given through narrated monologue. This both provides us with information about the (con)text in which they have been placed and reveals much about the "character" through whom the information is disseminated. *An Accidental Man* opens with Ludwig's proposal to Gracie, and accompanying retrospective musings that introduce all of the main characters as he perceives them. These perceptions are useful in providing a base layer for the grafting process that occurs as they are counterbalanced, confirmed and enriched in several subsequent "scenes" of this type, as well as conveying what Dipple describes as Ludwig's "earnest American aspect" (Dipple, 210). These swift and shifting opening "scenes" "feature" characters in a way that echoes cinematic techniques, starting and ending at climactic and arbitrary points that are unmediated by an "external" narrative voice while at the same time offering the uniquely literary internal view of narrated monologue. As the novel progresses, the scenes tend to focus less exclusively upon

²³. Culler, Jonathan, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London and Henley 1983, 79.

one character and to utilise shifting points of view that constitute an extradiegetic (Genette, 238) comment upon the particular states of mind that are evoked. Murdoch effectively conveys in this way the condition of self-absorption that humankind is prone to, making the point with an almost surreal lack of connection in a scene between Dorina, Charlotte and Mavis:

"Will you come and stay with me, Dorina?"

"Dear Charlotte--"

"Don't press her, let her think about it."

"You think Austin felt she might come and stay with you in his flat as a sort of halfway house?"

"Yes"

A grass snake got in with the goldfish once. Dorina's father tried to lift it out with a stick. It would have eaten the fish. Accidentally he killed it. Dorina ran away weeping. There were such terrible things in the world.

Mavis felt a great void where her faith had been. This feeling was new, she had not missed it before. Yet it was not that she suddenly felt it was valuable. She had sacrificed her life for something of no value. Yet the sacrifice itself was of value. Could that be so?

Mrs Carberry had seen such awful things on the telly before her husband came home and switched over to the World Cup. She saw some men out in the East shooting a prisoner. He was all tied up and they held his head down and shot him with a pistol. Sometimes the television men would say, hold it, don't kill him till our cameras are ready.

"I do think Dorina should come and stay with me." (145-6)

Ironically, it is the commonality of their experience of isolation and futility that renders them irrevocably separate from one another, a point suggested by the juxtaposition of "characteristic" narrative idioms that offer each person's "interpretation" of such an experience; Dorina's childlike parable of undeserved suffering, Mavis's philosophical self-searching, Mrs Carberry's inarticulate apprehension of inhumanity.

The narrative here offers an intensification of the techniques that Murdoch uses throughout the novel's "scenes", which consistently depict the characters' attempts to fend off or cope with the knowledge of the "terrible things in the world". This underlying fear of the accidental is subtly suggested by a strategy of internal motifs and echoes that link quite different "types" of character: Dorina's words here duplicate Gracie's after Ludwig's opening proposal, Mavis's sense of pointless self-sacrifice is restated in almost identical words later in the scene, speaking for Charlotte's real abnegation in caring for her mother and consequent ill-treatment after Alison's death. Dreams, too, are used to link characters and events and to suggest the consistency and infectious quality of unconscious fears: Dorina, particularly sensitive to her environment, is effectively victimised by Austin's dreams of Betty's death, and both dreams and eventually enacts this drowning; Gracie's dream of a mystical childhood experience is linked to Garth's silent following of her in the street, which, in turn parallels the fateful moment that Ludwig sees but ignores Dorina, creating for her, in Gracie's words, "a sense of a world without order" (396).

These implicit linkages and repetitions at the level of narrative prepare us for the thematic concern with recurrent action that Conradi calls "the single most notable feature of Murdoch plots" (77). He points out that in *The Bell*, Nick is twice the agent of Michael's destruction and that in *The Unicorn* "the repeating plot is Gothicised into a fairy-tale of suffering over seven-year epochs" (78). In *An Accidental Man* too, Austin conceives of

Matthew as complicit in his first wife's death, creating a situation in which Matthew does become ambiguously implicated in the similar death of his second wife. The sibling relationship between Charlotte and Clara dimly echos this reliance on life-myths which engender and draw from feelings of guilt, dependence and jealousy. The achievement of the later novel, however, is to show the "myth" as the property of the characters rather than (as the "symbolic" titles of the two early novels indicate) allowing it to feel like the product of authorial manipulation. Lorna Sage's description of the Murdochian turns of the screw as a "plot against plot"²⁴ succinctly captures the fine tension that is achieved in *An Accidental Man* between an ironically overwrought formal construction and its usage as a demonstration of the characters' own self-protective/destructive desire to contain their experience through the creation of fictions.

This authorship is made "literal" by the second major formal device employed by the novel: the multi-faceted perspectives offered by the techniques already considered are further extended by the epistolary sequences that punctuate the narrative. Not only does each letter offer a version of the character's "voice", confirming or contradicting what we already know, but also a series of microcosmic plots and interpretations. Murdoch succeeds superbly here in demonstrating the complexity of seemingly frivolous people, as through the assumption of various social facades the characters reveal their particular ethos and expose

²⁴. Sage, Lorna, "The Pursuit of Imperfection", *Critical Quarterly*, XIX, no.2, 62.

their innermost needs: Ludwig's fierce desire to rationalise his decision about Vietnam, Austin's manipulative self-pity, Dorina's unhappiness, are (amongst other things) all apparent in their differing formulations of the events and emotions to which we have been made privy in preceding scenes. For the central characters, the letters provide us with a "check" against the "scenes" which are at once more "reliable" and at the same time solipsistically exclusive in their figural mediation of the narrative.

"Literally" aside from the central characters, the epistolary sequences encompass a "peripheral" cast of writers who do not form part of the "story", but who attach the reader's attention to an extended world. In two radio interviews, Murdoch cites Shakespeare's comic characters, Shallow and Silence, as an example of supreme moral and aesthetic achievement²⁵ in the felt particularity of their existence on the edges of the action. Both the letters and "party" sections of pure dialogue provide fringe benefits of this sort in *An Accidental Man*, implying the chaos and "crowdedness" of reality through the proliferation of alternative plots (love affairs, pig farms and boutiques are begun and ended, fatal accidents bleakly reported) that challenge the centrality of "our" story, and a choral commentary that offers varying readings of it. The stylised realism of these devices constitutes the novel's own comment upon the ways in which form can intimate and at the same time limit reality; an issue echoed thematically and critically by Garth's sublimation of a life-changing experience

²⁵. With Ronald Bryden and A.S. Byatt, 1968, and A.S. Byatt, 1971. Quoted by Todd, 44.

into a novel, the publication of which precludes his life from changing in the way that he has temporarily seen to be necessary. The line between consoling fantasy and the healthful creative exercise of the imagination is shown to be ambiguously blurred, and this is pointed to by the very form in which the idea is embedded.

It is pointed to also by the consistency with which the characters employ the vocabulary of their cultural past and use it in the attempt to satisfy the endemic spiritual thirst of a secular age. A golden idyll of childhood is mythologised by many characters as a substitute for an age in which God existed and medieval romanticism is, as in *The Unicorn*, overtly utilised in its aspects of knight, princess, castle and quest in the attempt to colonise a barren experience of "reality". Murdoch has said that "creative imagination and obsessive fantasy may be very close, almost indistinguishable forces in the mind of the writer" (Conradi, 50), and this is shown to be true too of her characters through the very clarity of her imaginative formulation.

The narrative techniques of *An Accidental Man* work towards the effect of an "objective" presentation of subjectivity, giving it "the almost documentary aspect of a report on how the human imagination tries, and fails, to sort out its confusion" (Dipple, 207): the occasional emergence of an evaluative narrative voice is almost always in the context of figural meditation, and so serves almost as a heightened consciousness that is able to articulate the gnomic truths that characters suddenly and dimly intuit, rather than as an oppositional authorial mechanism:

Now there was neither home nor duty any more. She owned her toothbrush, but not the mug in which it stood

.... Everything was entirely as usual, and yet entirely alienated, as if what one had taken to be someone's house had turned out to be an antique shop. Just for a moment all these things were proclaiming a secret truth Ownership was an illusion.

Hardship reveals eternal truth, but only for a moment, since human beings soon recover and forget. Charlotte had not yet forgotten and still saw with the awful eye of vision. Of course it was a matter of pride to continue polishing and dusting. (94-5; my emphasis)

Narrated monologue, mediating as it does between character and narrator, contrives here to blur the movements into and out of the authorial pronouncement. Only once, and tellingly, is this contextualisation dispensed with:

Alone, Matthew sat down and poured himself another stiff whisky. He was drinking too hard these days.

When a man has reflected much he is tempted to imagine himself as the prime author of change. Perhaps in such a mood God actually succeeded in creating the world. But for man such moods are times of illusion. What we have deeply imagined we feign to control, often with what seem to be the best of motives. But the reality is huge and dark which lies beyond the lighted area of our intentions.

I came to set him free, thought Matthew. I came to change magic into spirit. It was all to be brought about by me.... I wanted that bond to be cut, but I did want to cut it myself. And now I am sad as if I had lost a beloved. (400; my emphasis)

The articulate intelligence and philosophical speculation of this central statement could easily be attributed to Matthew, in many ways the most self-aware character in the novel, and indeed he goes on to "think" along similar lines. The use of quoted monologue at this point emphasises, however, the differences between these two passages: that his thoughts are presented in such an articulated and finalised form suggests that his disappointment at the failure of his quest stops short of the preceding recognition of its

conceptual inadequacy. As in the previous passage, the authorial voice is here deeply related to the figural consciousness that it glosses. Unlike other moments of moral didacticism in the novel, however, the passage is not (con)textualised by the figural, and so draws attention to itself as a discrete statement rendered by the omniscient creative voice.

That the one moment of authorial emergence concerns the nature of creativity, and the relationship between art and reality, is of course no "accident". The task that both Matthew and Dorina describe in *An Accidental Man* as changing "magic into spirit" is soberly evaluated here as both dangerous and yet essential to the artist's endeavour. Through the imaginative act, man incarnates himself as "the prime author of change", and may do this so successfully that he is able to create/control all about him: in this way, everyone is shown as engaged in the creation of character and plot and thus prone to defamation of the reality which is "huge and dark". Almost at an end, the novel offers a critique of its own enterprise, ironically pointing to the ways in which it has sought to evoke the real and the accidental as coercive devices employed by its own characters. "Our revels are now ended", a cocktail party person quotes from *The Tempest* in the last lines of the book, and as Dipple puts it: "The artist as magician is Murdoch herself as a technician" (199); the tight formal design of the ending is both like a Shakespearian masque-drama and a refusal of meaning-full closure.

That the imposition of form and control is a human activity that is part of "reality" has been suggested in both *The Bell* and *The Unicorn*. In *An Accidental Man*, the narrative techniques provide an "allegory" of the difficulty of taking this into account without underestimating the world's darkness and unintelligibility, while simultaneously showing human beings as both possessing a subjective freedom and behaving in ways that are psychically predetermined. As Conradi says of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, "for want of any better term, the achievement of such balance might still be praised as 'realism'" (181).

CHAPTER THREE

It is not true, as some writers on the art maintain, that the probity of the speaker contributes nothing to his persuasiveness; on the contrary, we might almost affirm that his character [ethos] is the most potent of all the means to persuasion.

Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (I.1.2)

Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes. The tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*: 4.002.

A narratological examination of Murdoch's third-person fiction has revealed the ways in which orthodox verisimilitude, melodrama, philosophical discourse and romance combine to constitute a "contentedly impure" (Conradi, 258) mode that is capable at best of marrying competing views of reality and simultaneously suggesting that "truth"/"realism" are in infinite regress from the "dream of communication"¹ that attempts to contain them. I want now to examine an early and a more recent first-person text and to propose that the specific qualities of first-person narration are utilised by Murdoch to articulate this insight - that "reality is not a given whole" (AD, 20) - through her narrators' own struggles to reconcile the tension between perception and interpretation. I suggest, then, that these novels "allegorise" the difficulties of

¹. Hartman, Geoffrey, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today*. Yale University Press: New Haven 1980, 6.

re-presentation through their constituency as first-person narratives, as well as through the content of their "story", and that it is for this reason that they achieve a consistent excellence not always present in Murdoch's third-person novels. As in the last chapter, I will outline my conceptual framework through a discussion of the specific texts.

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, the book that exercised the most extensive critical influence on early Anglo-American narrative studies, Wayne Booth arrives at the conclusion that "the most overworked [formal] distinction is that of person. To say that a story is told in the first or third person will tell us nothing of importance unless we become more precise and describe how the particular qualities of the narrators relate to specific effects."² This methodological truism makes the necessary connection between "the particular qualities of the narrators" and "specific effects" so "obvious" as to deprive it of any real impact, and so allows Booth rather to emphasise the opposition between a "dramatised" and "undramatised" narrator that applies to both first- and third-person narration alike. While this typology is in itself quite accurate - a first person narrator may be centrally or only peripherally involved in the "story", and we have seen that third-person narration may range between "omniscient", "figural" and "authorial" positions³ - it does not account for what Cohn well

². Booth, Wayne, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London 1961, 150.

³. These terms are taken from Franz Stanzel's *Narrative Situations in the Novel*, Indiana University Press 1971, *passim*.

describes as "the profound change in narrative climate"(14) between the two modes; an omission ironically criticised by Booth himself in an otherwise appreciative appraisal of Genette's structuralist approach to the narratological enterprise:

"There is no hint in *Narrative Discourse* about how the narrating serves to heighten our sympathy for those like Marcel whom we travel with or to build our antipathy (whether serious or comic) toward any of the characters. Despite the quiet unmelodramatic tone, here be heroes and villains. But one would never suspect it, reading Genette." (Booth's italics)⁴

Booth implicitly takes note here of the intensification of meaning resulting from the nature of the first-person form that David Goldknopf has termed the "confessional increment": "everything an I-narrator tells us has a certain characterising significance over and above its data value, by virtue of the fact that he is telling it to us".⁵ This is an aspect that Genette cannot, in a sense, acknowledge, since he maintains that all narration is logically in the "first-person", and that "The real question is whether or not the narrator can use the first person to designate *one of his characters*" (Genette, 244). The way that Genette uses the term "narrator" in fact corresponds to Booth's concept of the "implied author" rather than indicating the narrating "voice", seeming to designate the verbal collocation of norms that inform the work, and which might be said to create "uttering instances". His typological model is thus based on what

⁴. Booth, Wayne, "Rhetorical Critics Old and New", *Reconstructing Literature*. (ed.) Lerner, Laurence, Basil Blackwell: Oxford 1983, 138.

⁵. Goldknopf, David, *The Life of the Novel*. Chicago 1972, 38-9.

Nilli Diengott terms the "perceptibility of the narrative instance"⁶ rather than on "person"-alised "narrators", and he expresses, in a footnote, the need for "a more neutral or more extensive term which would not unduly connote, as this one does, the "humanness" of the narrative agent, even though in fiction nothing prevents us from entrusting that role to an animal...or indeed to an 'inanimate' object" (Genette, 244).

In effect, Genette attempts to evaluate narrating techniques in "purely" structural terms, to keep his critical metalanguage free of the mimetic notions that may permeate the texts it examines: thus first-person retrospective narration is equated with third-person authorial narration, since the schism between the "narrating instance" and the character is equally absolute in narrative rather than mimetic terms. While this stress on the non-personality of the uttering instance seems to me to be appropriate in considering "third-person" narration (what Genette would term "extradiegetic-heterodiegetic"; a "nonembedded" narrative communicated by a non-participatory "voice"), it is surely willfully "technical" in its application to a form that is centered around the revelation of personality through a specifically "subjective" language. Even if, as Genette suggests, the role of the narrating agent is entrusted to "an animal" or "inanimate object", the point is surely that we will attempt to endow that agent with "person-ality" by virtue of

⁶. Diengott, Nilli, "The Mimetic Language Game and Two Typologies of Narrators", *Modern fiction Studies*, XXXIII, No.3, Autumn 1987, 532.

its employment of an "I".⁷ In fact, Genette's typology clearly acknowledges the role of the "person" in that the heterodiegetic and homodiegetic categories define the degree of narratorial participation in the recounted events, and thus imply a mimetic unity of presence in the narrative "position".

For different reasons, then, both Booth and Genette leave out of account the altered relationship between the narrator and the protagonist when that protagonist is his/her own past self, although both note the possibilities of employing the first-person narrator as hero(ine) or as an observer of the narrative action. This relationship, between the first-person "narrating self" and the "experiencing self", may seem superficially similar to that of a third-person narrative "voice" (whether overtly authorial or figurally mediated) to "its" characters, in that presentation, commentary and evaluation are involved in both cases: it is, however, essentially different in that everything that is narrated in first-person form is existentially relevant for the narrator. To put it another way, past thought must be presented as *remembered*

7. The desire to recuperate the narrating agent or instance mimetically is interestingly evident in critical readings of Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *La Jalousie* (1957), where the modernist convention of limited "point of view" is employed with extreme rigour without an attached "I". The effect of this is to place the reader in the locus from which the "world" of the novel is seen, to experience *la jalousie* by seeing through *la jalousie*. The obsessive precision with which the *je-néant* narrator (Morrisette, 114) delineates the spatial disposition of objects serves, however, to position the effaced consciousness so precisely as to make it readily recuperable in mimetic terms: the reader "deduces" the figure of the jealous husband, and thereby duplicates "his" voyeuristic act of reconstruction. (See Morrisette, Bruce, *Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet*. Paris 1963; McHale, Brian, *Postmodernist Fiction*. Methuen: New York and London 1987.)

as well as expressed by the self, and this imaginative recreation of the past may itself become an important thematic and characterising aspect of the novel.

The yoking of the two "selves" through the first-person pronoun means that the experiencing self is always viewed by a retrospective narrator who "knows the plot", and who is free to slide along the connecting temporal axis. The presentation of this plot is, however, necessarily limited by the narrator's perception and understanding of his or her own past, so that, contrary to our instinctive expectations, the omniscient narrator of a third-person fiction has a more plausible access to the psyches populating that narrative than does the first-person narrator. Thus, where psychonarration can evoke unacknowledged sub-verbal depths of consciousness, its first-person equivalent, self-narration (Cohn, 14), can only reveal what the character already knows and comes to learn about him/herself. The correlation pointed to in third-person narration between a sense of the real and the "artifice" or "mediacy" of the technique that evokes this sense is to some extent dissolved by the evident (and literal) "self-consciousness" of the enterprise: since the text cannot attempt to render itself transparent in the service of reality, it must attempt the opposite process of "solidifying" and authenticating its own material by emphasising the process by which the protagonist is transformed into the narrator of the story. That is, the first-person novel tends to reveal both a *psychomachia* and its successful completion by showing how its "hero(ine)" has acquired enough self-knowledge to become the interpreter of his/her own story.

Under the Net is Murdoch's first published novel,^a and the first of her often masterly expositions of the first-person male voice, of which there are six to date. Perhaps her most "philosophical" fiction, it anticipates poststructuralist concerns in its concentration on the relationship between language and representation, yet embodies these in a comic picaresque quest of stylish and sophisticated narrative allure. The book's immediate popularity was connected to its literary relationship to the absurdist writings of Samuel Beckett and dedicatee Raymond Queneau, whose novels its hero cherishes, and to its identification with the post world-war II renaissance of "angry" social realist novels. As I suggested in Chapter One, however, both ascriptions are fundamentally misplaced; in its overt concern with the way in which artistic form both redeems and deforms the real, *Under the Net* took on "anxieties about realism many decades before these became fashionable in England" (Conradi, 27), while at the same time insisting upon the reality and difficulty of the relationship between words and actions. The interest of this novel is now partly in its thematic prefiguring of the Murdochian oeuvre, one aspect of which is the usage of the first-person to "embody" these anxieties. A closer look at *Under the Net*, using Cohn's narratorial definitions, will give substance to these points.

As third-person narration may choose a variety of positions between the poles of authorial or figural evocation of consciousness, so first-person narration ranges between a

^a. Byatt and Conradi among others mention five earlier unpublished novels.

retrospective voice, consciously presenting the "story", and a monologic voice that seems unaware of its textuality (the "case-limit" of which would be what is usually referred to as "interior monologue"). Within the retrospective mode, to which Murdoch adheres in the first-person novels, Cohn finds the same basic types of presentation of consciousness as she has described in third-person narrative; psycho-narration becomes "self-narration", and monologues either "self-quoted" or "self-narrated". Like psycho-narration, self-narration encompasses a range of possible styles whose poles are similarly termed *dissonant* and *consonant*: from the enlightened and distanced memorialist who discursively elucidates the confusions of earlier days, to the narrator who identifies so closely with the past self as to ostensibly renounce all cognitive privilege. Consistent adherence to one position is, however, relatively rare, most retrospective first-person novels tending to modulate between the "narrating self" and the "experiencing self" in order to use the expectation and tension that dissonant commentary can evoke, through its display of retrospective knowledge, to heighten our perception of the "consonant" action.

Under the Net initially appears to practise this modulation to just such ends; in the first chapter particularly, passages of consonant self-narration are consistently interrupted by discursive, "dissonant" narratorial asides in the present tense, comprising commentary and reflection upon people and events that would seem to issue from Jake-as-narrator. Later in the novel, however, events prove much of this to be part of a structure of self-deluding fictions. We are authoritatively told early on, for

example, that Finn has "very little inner life", and that "[he] is always saying he will go back to Ireland...but he never goes" (22). The events of the novel prove these early conclusions to be erroneous and suggest that they are based on an immensely inadequate conception of Finn's personality that is a consequence of character-Jake's moral solipsism. This is early hinted at in a similarly disingenuous statement that points subtly to the apparently "natural" centralisation of "story" around the organising consciousness: "I count Finn as an inhabitant of my universe, and cannot conceive that he has one containing me; and this arrangement seems restful for both of us" (9). Jake-as-narrator is, of course, perfectly aware of his past misapprehensions and their implications, and it is, in a sense, the process of becoming-aware that the novel enacts; the recognition of his misreadings that "enables" Jake, as it were, to write the story that is *Under the Net*. Murdoch's use of apparently dissonant narration that is later revealed to have conveyed "consonant" information makes palpable the necessities and dangers of formal organisation; by means of this technique, we are lulled, like Jake, into interpreting and solidifying the "facts" through a too-easy adherence to the literal and metaphoric presence of the "first-person", and are similarly compelled eventually to "re-read" characters and events.

The necessity of a perpetual re-reading of one's "context" in life is one of the novel's central ideas, articulated explicitly through the character and ideas of Hugo Belfounder and "allegorically" through Jake's literal re-reading of another

author. At the time of the story, Jake is a writer who tells us that he lives by "literary hack-work, and a little original writing, as little as possible" (21). Part of the "hack-work" is regular translation of the French novelist Breteuil, whose "bad best-selling stuff" allows Jake to feel superior as an artist, while retaining a defensive refusal to grapple with the realities of art, as he refuses the reality of personal relationships:

Le Rossignol would be a best-seller, and that meant money in my pocket. It's about a young composer who is psychoanalysed and then finds that his creative urge is gone. I enjoyed this one, though it's bad best-selling stuff like everything that Jean-Pierre writes.

Dave Gellman says I specialize in translating Breteuil because that's the sort of book I wish I could write myself, but this is not so. I translate Breteuil because it's easy and because it sells like hot cakes in any language. Also, in a perverse way, I just enjoy translating, it's like opening one's mouth and hearing someone else's voice emerge....Anything rather than original work, as Dave says. (20)

Like (self-)narrated monologue, this offers the character's time-bound thoughts in the guise of "objective" narration, and like (self-)quoted monologue, casts them partly in the narrative present. This combination of recognisably past thought ("*Le Rossignol* would be a best-seller"), "fact" ("It's about a young composer..."), and feeling ("I enjoyed this one") is fused into a judgement that, as later becomes clear, is Jake's at the time of the "story" rather than the time of narration. This sleight-of-hand is employed throughout the novel, "deceiving" the reader, whose knowledge of what Barthes calls the "semic code"⁹ (cultural

⁹. Barthes, Roland, *S/Z* (trans. Miller, Richard). Hill and Wang: New York 1974, 20.

stereotypes like dissonant narrators who, sadder and wiser, review their past) produces a belief in what seems to be an authoritative narrating-self: we take Jake's presentation of "fact" here as still applicable to his life as it is at the moment of narration ("now"), and this effects in us a comparable shock to Jake's when, in this case, Jean Pierre Breteuil wins the *Prix Goncourt* despite the initial decisive dismissal of his work.

Jake in fact warns us at the outset of his unreliability as a narrator and connects this explicitly to his being as an artist: when tempted to tell Mrs Tinkham about his homelessness:

I gritted my teeth against speech. I wanted to wait until I could present my story in a more dramatic way. The thing had possibilities but as yet it lacked form. If I spoke now there was always the danger of my telling the truth: when caught unawares I usually tell the truth, and what's duller than that? (18)

He has a rule of "never speaking frankly to women in moments of emotion" (13), confesses that he has misinformed the reader about paying Madge "a little rent" (he pays none), notes that when questioned directly he usually lies (96) and twice mentions "uttering my first lie" (43, 220). He concomitantly assumes that others are lying back, and this allows him to disregard any version of events that is uncongenial to him. When Sadie Quentin, sister of a past love, Anna, tells Jake that she is being pursued by his erstwhile friend, Hugo, he refuses to believe her, and sets in train the series of misunderstandings which thread through the story:

I knew from old that Sadie was a notorious liar and would tell any falsehood to procure herself even a quite temporary advantage. Also the sheer improbability of Hugo being in love with Sadie was, when I considered it, overwhelming....That there was some stratagem going forward which involved Hugo was very possible; but a *more likely explanation* of it was that Sadie was up to some professional caper which Hugo was trying to circumvent....Indeed, it was even possible that it was Sadie who was in love with Hugo and was trying to entangle him in some way. This, when it occurred to me, seemed a very *plausible hypothesis* indeed.

When I had come to this conclusion I felt better. Somehow the idea of Hugo gone on Sadie had been extremely distasteful to me. (68; my emphases)

Self-narrated monologue here conflates the "experiencing" thoughts and the "narrating" tense to produce both a demonstration of self-delusion and the experience of its plausibility: the (re)formulation of "facts" into "a more likely explanation", with a "plausible hypothesis", and thenceforth into a "conclusion", hints at the inaccuracy of Jake's musings and at his need, stated early on, for "everything in...life to have a sufficient reason" (24). When Hugo, for whom Jake has been searching throughout the course of the story, starts unwittingly to reveal the true nature of the relationships between himself and the Quentin sisters, Jake feels himself to begin to "get the facts; theories could come later" (225). Ironically, however, he is at this point still "someone in the grip of a theory" (43), as he early decides Anna to be: having decided that Hugo cannot be in love with Sadie, he smugly presumes that it is Anna that they are discussing:

"What made you think that?" I asked. "I mean, that she was keen on me."

"She talked about you a lot," said Hugo, "and asked me questions about you."

"What a bore for you," I said, and I smiled to myself. Nothing is more maddening than being questioned by the object

of one's interest about the object of hers, should that object not be you. (225)

We are kept firmly in the domain of the experiencing self here as Murdoch makes use of the gnomic statement that is the province of the all-knowing, authorial narrator in order to reinforce our collusion in Jake's misprision of people and situations. When Hugo's revelations open up all the events and relationships in the book to new interpretation, Jake notes that "[a] pattern in my mind was scattered and the pieces of it went flying about me like birds" (225), an image later reinforced by the entry of the starlings "whirring" around Hugo's empty flat. The effect of consonance-in-disguise is seen here to offer the reader a fictional experience that parallels the character's in "life": we too are forced to abandon the pre-scribed "pattern" in the light of this new knowledge, and to take in the different "point" of many events. Ross Chambers argues in *Story and Situation* that twentieth-century narratology has ignored the phenomenon of "narrative point", offering for analysis a model of "a stable text whose characters are determined by an overriding vision and/or voice that takes responsibility for the act of narration and determines 'our' understanding, as readers, of character and event".¹⁰ It seems to me, however, that narratological examination reveals here how the first-person form of *Under the Net* works, paradoxically, to destabilise the very notion of "an overriding vision", through an

¹⁰. Chambers, Ross, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*. Manchester University Press: Manchester 1984, 19.

explicit demonstration of how different situations produce different "point" for both narrator and reader.

The realisation that he "knew everything", but "got it all the wrong way round", "dislocate[s] past, present and future" (227), and teaches Jake to attenuate his desire for cognitive absolutes:

I had no longer any picture of Anna. She faded like a sorcerer's apparition; and yet somehow her presence remained to me, more substantial than before. It seemed as if, for the first time, Anna really existed now as a separate being and not as a part of myself. To experience this was extremely painful. Yet as I tried to keep my eyes fixed upon where she was I felt towards her a sense of initiative which was perhaps after all one of the guises of love. Anna was something which had to be learnt afresh. *When does one ever know a human being?* Perhaps only after one has realized the impossibility of knowledge and renounced the desire for it and finally ceased to feel even the need of it. (238; my emphasis)

This question is to be re-articulated by another Murdochian writer-narrator, Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* (1973), and explicitly connected there to the problems of realistic representation in art: the tension between the need to tell, or see, the truth, and the need for concepts and form. These two positions are given specific "voice", both literally and metaphorically, in the earlier novel, through the reported conversations with Hugo which Jake works up into stylish, flowery philosophic dialogues and publishes as "The Silencer". Hugo is deeply suspicious of mimetic art and describes language as "a machine for making falsehoods" (60). "Try describing anything", he tells Jake, "our conversation for instance, and see how absolutely instinctively you..." "Touch it up?" "It's deeper than that," said Hugo. "The language just won't let you present it as it

really was." (59) It is, of course, a deliberate irony that Jake finds himself "touching up" their talks, "constantly supplying just that bit of shape, that hint of relation, which the original had lacked" (63), and a subtler one that, as Conradi points out, despite the presentation of a unified "original" conversation between Jake and Hugo, we are told that "it took half a dozen cold cure sessions to reach this point", so that the version that we receive is also an "artistic" conflation that is at least one remove from "the truth".

This postulation of truth as infinitely receding across intervening cultural conceptions anticipates postmodernist doubts about representation and knowledge,¹¹ but unlike contemporary deconstructionists, Hugo exhibits no anxiety about the impossibility of unmediated vision. Jake comments that for Hugo, "each thing was astonishing, delightful, complicated, and mysterious" (58), and it is the acquiring of this Hopkins-like sense of the unclassifiable particularity of things that finally frees him from artistic stasis. Paradoxically, he must then immediately begin to use concepts and constructs, the Wittgensteinian net of language to which the title alludes;¹² the only means of describing the world and yet the simultaneous mechanism that transforms its "reality". The link between Jake's habit of untruth and his care for verbal and written shapeliness is

¹¹. Christopher Bigsby suggests this to Murdoch, who replies: "Oh yes, all the stuff that Barthes and Co. think they invented. I knew all about that in the 1930s." (*The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition*. Junction Books: London 1982, 228.)

¹². *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, 6.341.

not, in *Under the Net*, a final judgement about conceptualisation, theory or art: re-reading "The Silencer", Jake notices "a variety of ways in which the position of Tamarus might be strengthened" (81), and Hugo, the source of the ideas, later tells him that he "learnt an awful lot from it" (220), anticipating Murdoch's statement that "the final and best discoveries are often made in the formulation of the statement".¹³ What Jake learns is that this formulation must take cognisance of its own desire to suppress the detail and contingency of the world, to impose the net of interpretations and assumptions that controls and "fixes" what is "brute and nameless" behind words.

Conradi notes that the critic too has to struggle to crawl under the net: "it is easy enough to speak about "structure", but hard to find a context in which to celebrate those particulars which break away from and blur the structure, and give us the artful illusion that the work is overflowing back into life. Jake's problem is also the reader's" (43-4). There is much incident, event, story, in *Under the Net* that is not colonised by formal necessity, but "meaningful" just because it has happened, as are both Pierrot's and Murphy's experiences in the two novels alluded to in the first chapter. The consonant narrative techniques keep us within the realms of the "story", emphasising the "pure pleasure"¹⁴ of the fiction while attempting to alert us to the

¹³. Murdoch, Iris, *The Fire and the Sun*. Oxford University Press: Oxford 1977, 87. All further references will be to this edition and will be abbreviated as FS.

¹⁴. Haffenden, John, *Novelists in Interview*. Methuen: London and New York 1985, 208.

dangerous pull of the imagination, and are thus expressive of Hugo's anti-theory "theory"; that one should be "ruled by the situation itself"(80). The novel ends in "story-time" rather than the "now" of narration, leaving Jake's new access to the real appropriately open-ended and imperfect as he eschews classification of Mrs Tinkham's kittens, half of whom are pure Siamese, half pure tabby: "It's just one of the wonders of the world", he says in the novel's closing words.

Under the Net might itself be seen as a celebration of these wonders rather than as an attempt to contain them within a realistic structure, its picaresque, episodic organisation around specific ideas lending it the form of a philosophic fable in which the settings are often strange or fantastic, the action sometimes unreal, and the patterning overtly deliberate. It is a tribute to Murdoch's narrative power, however, that these elements of the "unreal" at the same time direct the reader's attention toward the sensory world, infusing the ordinary with a vertiginous strangeness that makes us "real-ise" it anew. Literature "creates a "vision" of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it"¹⁵ argued Russian Formalist critic Victor Shklovsky, discussing literature's unique ability to "defamiliarise" our habitual perceptions of the world through its inventive subversion of the patterns of ordinary language, ideological forms and literary codes. Murdoch here attempts this disorganisation of our categories of the real/unreal, literary/lifelike at the levels of

¹⁵. quoted by Bennett, Tony, *Formalism and Marxism*. Methuen: London and New York 1979, 24.

both form and content: Conradi points out that in the picaresque novel it is traditionally "the quest of the knight that matters, while that of his Sancho Panza takes second place" (31),¹⁶ and Jake's acknowledgement of the solipsism that leads him to ignore Finn's "story" might be seen as an ironic deconstruction of the novel's own participation in this genre. It is the relinquishing of such solipsism that, paradoxically, allows Jake to speak in the "first-person": his ability to accept the kittens' "difference", and by implication the world's incomprehensibility, suggests that he has begun, by the end of the novel, to learn to "see" rather than always attempt to "know"; a process that *Under the Net*, the novel that he has been fictively enabled to write, demonstrates in turn.

If *Under the Net* displays anxieties about realism that anticipate a later literary climate, *The Black Prince* is of its time in formally embodying these in an integumental framed narrative that is both a realist tale - an "adventure story", a "celebration of love" - and a fable about artistic creation and its relation to truth. Bradley Pearson's sad and funny account of his love for the daughter of a friend and rival novelist is enclosed in fictive editorial matter and contradicted in postscripts "by" several of the characters. The novel thus foregrounds its own "fictionality" and suggests an allegiance to a contemporary novelistic movement

¹⁶. Bennett points out that this archetypal picaresque couple can in turn be read as "a device of 'defamiliarisation' in relation to the canons of chivalric romance" (21).

that has been termed "metafiction"¹⁷ in order to denote its overt formal and/or thematic self-awareness. In *Narcissistic Narrative*, a critical study of metafiction, Linda Hutcheon discusses our contemporary cultural desire to highlight the construct-ive nature of our artefacts in the light of art's dual propensity toward realism and social documentation on the one hand, and towards form, "narcissism" and self-exposure on the other: a duality that Murdoch differently describes in "Against Dryness" in terms of a contemporary fictional degeneration into the "journalistic" and the "crystalline". Hutcheon argues that *mimesis* has always included *diegesis*, that *Don Quixote* is "not only the first 'realistic' novel but also the first self-reflexive one",¹⁸ and that the explicitness and intensity of modern textual self-preoccupation differs only in the degree of emphasis on process (the "making" of the fictive artefact) rather than product (the presented story): presumably the formal and thematic self-awareness of metafiction reflects a poststructuralist consciousness of the instability of the relationship between the "language" of representation and "reality".

¹⁷. The term seems first to have been used by Robert Scholes in *The Fabulators*, London and New York 1967, and is perhaps best exemplified by John Fowles's self-consciously pseudo-Victorian novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, to which I have referred in Chapter One.

¹⁸. Hutcheon, Linda, *Narcissistic Narrative*. Methuen: London and New York 1984, 4.

The dependence of what Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg describe as "empirical" narrative¹⁹ on stable linguistic referents is an issue that Murdoch discusses in her early critical book on Sartre, and which is clearly important to her.²⁰ The recognition that all speech is in a sense distortion, that "the whole language is a machine for making falsehoods", is one common to the narrators of both *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince*, men who want to be serious artists and who are bedeviled by this paralysing knowledge: Jake has concluded that "the present age was one in which it was not possible to write an epic" and stops himself "just short of the point at which it would have become clear...that the present age was not one in which it was possible to write a novel" (19); Bradley meditates upon art's function and relationship to "life":

Art...is the telling of truth, and is the only available method for the telling of certain truths. Yet how almost impossibly difficult it is not to let the marvels of the instrument itself interfere with the task to which it is dedicated....How can one describe a human being 'justly'? How can one describe oneself? With what an air of false coy humility, with what an assumed confiding simplicity one sets about it! 'I am a puritan', and so on. Faugh! How can these statements not be false? Even 'I am tall' has a context. How the angels must laugh and sigh. Yet what can one do but try to lodge one's vision somehow inside this layered stuff of ironic sensibility, which, if I were a fictitious character, would be that much deeper and denser? (55-56)

¹⁹. Scholes, Robert and Kellogg, Robert, *The Nature of Narrative*. Oxford University Press, 1966, 254.

²⁰. I have quoted the relevant passage in the introduction: "We can no longer take language for granted as a medium of communication. We are like people who for a long time looked out of a window without noticing the glass - and then one day began to notice this too". This metaphor is used again in the *Black Prince* where its source in 1 Corinthians, 13 is made explicit: "We conversed as angles might converse, not through a glass darkly, but face to face" (200).

The-chinese box structure of *The Black Prince* is further complicated here since Bradley is indeed a fictitious character, engaged in fictitious autobiography. The usage and adeptness of formal irony in this novel can be measured against the "simple" thematic embodiment of these issues in *Under the Net*, where their collaboration with the picaresque produces a philosophic fable fully aware of its tangential angle to the realist enterprise. In the later novel, Murdoch has adopted with relish and skill the various devices of style and structure that a self-reflexively "fictional"²¹ mode has offered, without accepting or promulgating the wider demoralising implications: as Lorna Sage puts it, reality certainly does elude words, but "novels can be made out of their unending approximations and wasteful clashes".²² A closer look at the "making" of *The Black Prince* (and "The Black Prince") will reveal Murdoch's formal development of, and play with, the problematics of representation that are already thematically evident in *Under the Net*, as well as a strong moral attachment to the values of "realism"; a combination that led an early reviewer of *The Black Prince* to term it an "anti-anti-novel".²³

²¹. Scholes and Kellogg use this word to designate a romantic and didactic tradition of narrative that is essentially concerned with the ideal rather than the real, with truth in an "artistic" rather than a representational way. (See *The Nature of Narrative*, 13-14.)

²². Sage, Lorna, "Female Fictions", in Bradbury and Palmer (eds.), *The Contemporary English Novel*. Edward Arnold: London 1979, 69.

²³. Pearson, Gabriel, "Simultaneous and Quadratic", *Guardian*, 22 Feb. 1973.

The novel opens with a brief "Foreword" by a suppositious "Editor", P. Loxias, whose account of his circumstantial possession of the manuscript "belongs to a tradition of realism going back as far as Defoe" (Conradi, 187), while his name indicates his symbolic function as the Apollo figure who serves here as both inspiration and addressee. Dipple remarks that "The identification probably has its source in Aeschylus, where in the *Agamemnon* Cassandra addresses her god Apollo as Loxias as she strips herself of her prophetic garment and prepares to die" (112), and in his postscript Loxias endorses an ironically modernised description of himself that provides a clear reference to the mythical flaying of the mortal Marsayas by Apollo for his hubristic challenging of the god to a musical contest: "The name conceals the identity of a notorious rapist and murderer, a well-known musical virtuoso, whose murder by a peculiarly horrible method of a successful fellow-musician made the headlines some considerable time ago" (355). The myth too images a stripping in preparation for death - Edgar Wind describes the flaying as "a tragic ordeal of purification by which the ugliness of the outward man was thrown off and the beauty of his inward self revealed"²⁴ - and this prepares us for a tale that is both about divinely inspired ascesis and real human pain and

²⁴. Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*. London 1958; quoted by Conradi, 188.

fictional layer; Bradley's own "foreword", which acts as a prosopopeia to his "past self", and which he begins with an explication of his methods for rendering that self and that past:

Although several years have now passed since the events recorded in this fable, I shall in telling it adopt the modern technique of narration, allowing the narrating consciousness to pass like a light along its series of present moments, aware of the past, unaware of what is to come. I shall, that is, inhibit my past self... (xi)

The precise delineation of a consonant narrative position, the slightly stiff technical vocabulary ("the modern technique of narration"), the careful rhythm balance of the prose; all of these immediately suggest Bradley's intellectual, fastidious personality as well as an "author-ity" over the material that is confirmed by his subsequent identification with a later narrating-self, "a wiser and more charitable man" (xi). Interestingly, Bradley's opening explanations about the mechanics of his narration sound remarkably similar to James Joyce's comments about the prototype for his own employment of interior monologue in *Ulysses*,: "In that book [Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés*] the reader finds himself established, from the first lines, in the thought of the principal personage, and the uninterrupted unrolling of that thought, replacing the usual form of narrative, conveys to us what this personage is doing or what is happening to him".²⁷ Cohn remarks that the "vast majority" of first-person novels present themselves as written memoirs, or as "spoken discourse subsequently recorded by a listener"(175), and identifies this authenticating impulse as

²⁷. Quoted by Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 173.

absent from the interior monologue,²⁸ which can only effect an illusion of immediacy by effacing the reality of its own linguistic existence. In Joyce's description it is somehow the thought *itself* that "conveys" the action, whereas Bradley feels a converse need to account for the "obvious" fiction of immediacy/the effacement of mediacy, that is an essential constituent of "realism", "the usual form of narrative". Where interior monologue offers the illusion of bypassing the machinery of language, *The Black Prince* might be said to expose its cogs and wheels in order to suggest "the *direction* in which the acquisition of a true unmediated vision might lie" (Conradi, 187; my emphasis), rather than to reveal itself as a locus of "truth" in a metafictional spirit of self-exposure.

The Neoplatonism already evidenced by Loxias is extended in Bradley's foreword, which combines "factual" background and philosophic discourse on virtue and its relation to art and life. Both the narrating and the experiencing selves are evidenced as Bradley offers a description of himself that is "in the *persona* of the self of several years ago" (xii), but "irradiated", as he puts it, by the light of a later wisdom. This (con)fusion of voices arouses and maintains various levels of expectation and curiosity: we are told of the "fabulous" and "dramatic" nature of "the story

²⁸. Cohn points out that the term has been conflated to designate two quite different phenomena: "1) a narrative technique for presenting a character's consciousness by direct quotation of his thoughts in a surrounding narrative context; and 2) a narrative *genre* constituted in its entirety by the silent self-communion of a fictional mind." (*Transparent Minds*, 15) The latter, to which she refers here, should thus more accurately be called "autonomous interior monologue".

that follows" (xii) but that its narrator's past work has "reached and doubtless will reach only a perceptive few" (xii); we are told too that "human life is horrible" and "utterly unlike art" (xviii), but that "Good art speaks truth, indeed is truth" (xi). The disparity between the comments and observations of the narrator who describes himself as "conventional, nervous, puritanical, the slave of habit" (xviii), and the author of these gnomic observations is evident but the demarcation still unclear here: the "story" will reveal the pulling of the self from the self ("the taking away of faces") that provides for the transmutation from the one to the other. "The Black Prince", like *Under the Net*, will show life as stranger than fiction ("fabulous", "dramatic") and yet ironically constituting the means by which life is able to become fiction.

The "real" oppositions between life and fictional form are pointed to by Bradley in the opening of the central narrative, extending the emphasis on the *writing* of the tale that has already been made evident:

It might be most dramatically effective to begin the tale at the moment when Arnold Baffin rang me up and said, 'Bradley, could you come round here please, I think I may have just killed my wife'. A deeper pattern however suggests Francis Marloe as the first speaker, the page or house-boy (these images would appeal to him) who, some half-hour before Arnold's momentous telephone call, initiates the action. For the news that Francis brought me forms the frame, or counter point, or outward packaging of what happened then and later in the drama of Arnold Baffin. There are indeed many places where I could start. I might start with Rachel's tears, or Priscilla's. There is much shedding of tears in this story. In a complex explanation any order may seem arbitrary. Where after all does anything begin?

A number of effects are skilfully achieved here through the retention of perspective by the narrating self: the suggestion that the sensational aspects of the story are not appropriate to its "deeper pattern" subtly accomplishes as "dramatic" an opening as could be wished for, while the "shock value" of this startling statement is nicely balanced against, and increased by, the subsequent measured evaluation of formal strategies. In a sense, this opening statement encapsulates much of the "meaning" of *The Black Prince*, balancing as it does form against formlessness, genre (the thriller, the murder mystery) against "reality", a centre of significance (Bradley) against many others (Arnold, Rachel, Priscilla), and simultaneously offering the real lure of an exciting and suspenseful story ("Art is adventure stories" Loxias tells us at the end {363}). Retrospectively too, we realise that beginning with Arnold's telephone call about Rachel would be "dramatically effective" in its balancing of Rachel's call to Bradley about Arnold at the end of his narrative. The way in which such neat circularity is indicated, yet avoided, is a measure of the novel's skilful enlargement of "the drama of Arnold Baffin" into an area of quite different concerns while still retaining a primary sense of the importance of the foregrounded subject matter.

Early on in the novel, Bradley describes its subject matter as "the story of my relations with Arnold and the astounding climax to which these relations led" (8); reminiscent, as Conradi points out, of Jake's statement in *Under the Net* that "my acquaintance with Hugo is the central theme of this book" (53). Like Jake also, Bradley measures himself against a prolific, apparently bad fellow-

novelist, using the deficiencies of the other to compensate for his own failure. We receive Bradley's opinion early on, mediated through the guilty memory of his review of Arnold's latest novel whilst arguing with him about their respective conceptions of art: "Arnold Baffin's work was a congeries of amusing anecdotes loosely garbled into 'racy stories' with the help of half-baked unmeditated symbolism....Arnold Baffin wrote too much, too fast. Arnold Baffin was really just a talented journalist" (27). Together with Julian's description of her father's novels as "Jesus and Mary and Buddha and Shiva and the Fisher King all chasing round and round dressed up as people in Chelsea" (107), this provides a parodic account of Murdoch's own work,²⁹ and an exemplification of "journalistic", as opposed to Bradley's "crystalline", writing as Murdoch describes it in "Against Dryness": Bradley believes in long-suffering and apprenticeship, "the condensing and refining of a conception almost to nothing" (152), but lacks curiosity about the world, whereas Arnold "regard[s] art as 'fun'", liking and accepting everything, failing to "make distinctions" (152). In both cases, extended imaginative endeavour is absent: "Fantasy operates either with shapeless day-dreams (the journalistic story) or with small myths, toys, crystals....Neither grapples with reality" (AD, 19). The "story" enacts Bradley's progressive tuition in contingency, enabling him to write the very

²⁹. As many critics have pointed out: Byatt, A.S., "People in Paper Houses", 35; Conradi, 192; Dipple, 117; Pearson, Gabriel, "Simultaneous and Quadratic", *Guardian*, 22 Feb, 1973.

"Baffinesque"³⁰ tale of his love for Julian. Similarly, although his "story" remains opaque to us, Arnold feels that his love for Christian has "*completely transformed*" (212) him as a writer: "I have never been in a *grimmer* mood in my life....I shall write much better *harder* stuff in future, as a result of this, whatever happens", he tells Bradley in the letter that precipitates his final and fatal quarrel with Rachel.

Both men thus undergo the ministrations of Eros, and feel themselves to be metamorphosised both as men and as artists; or rather, to see that the one thing is the same as the other. "[M]y development as an artist was my development as a man" (113), Bradley says early on, but he is unable to breach the gap between life and art until the cataclysmic experience of his unlikely love for Julian. Murdoch has described Eros as "the ambiguous spiritual mediator and moving spirit of mankind" (*FS*, 34), and this ambiguity is central to the *The Black Prince*: if in its higher incarnations it fires the creation of art, it also manifests itself in "possession and vindication of self" (359), as Julian puts it in her postscript. Conradi suggests that one of the most original elements in Murdoch's work is "the extraordinary marriage between Freud and Plato that she has effected, between a mechanical model of the psyche and a moral one" (77), and these different manifestation of Eros image the simultaneous apprehension of human beings as both "powered by mechanical energy of an egocentric kind" and as motivated by the desire for God and Good. The novel

³⁰. Byatt, A.S., "People in Paper Houses", in *The Contemporary English Novel*. Edward Arnold: London 1979, 35.

displays the works of this sacred and profane love machine through the alternating voices of "narrator" and "character", who in turn demonstrate the progressive stages of "de-facement" and the enlargement of self that the tuition of Eros facilitates. The point is, perhaps, that each is given its due: the gravitational pull of the "story" is balanced by the educative clarification of passion that the "narrating" undertakes, and each is mediated through the other: "one might reductively say that the 'myth' in [Murdoch's] books comes out of Freud, but the expansion away from it out of Plato" (Conradi, 77).

Seizure by Eros is experienced at each "level"³¹ by both the characters and the reader: in *The Bell*, Michael feels that both his religious and sexual impulses spring "deeply from the same source" (99), and Bradley too, writes of "my love and my art, as aspects of what was ultimately one and the same" (172). Even the puritanical Julian of the postscript admits that "Soul-energy may be called sex down to the bottom. (Or up to the top)" (359). *The Black Prince* demonstrates these ambiguities through the ambiguities of the narration, which highlights the paradoxical relations between "fiction" and "truth" in a way that oddly enhances our sense of its realism. Bradley's tripartite tale is told primarily "by" the experiencing self, but amended and commented upon by its reflective, wiser narrating-self. The punctuation of the story by "soliloquies" from its "author" functions as an interrogative, disruptive, and yet pleasurable deference, invoking a central

³¹. Conradi, to whom the previous paragraph is greatly indebted, frequently refers to "high" and "low" Eros.

convention of the first-person genre: we know that the "story" is also the story of the movement from "character" to narrator, and the gap between these two "positions" constitutes the novel's central interpretive aporia. As Bradley himself remarks: "There is...an eternal discrepancy between the self-knowledge which we gain by observing ourselves objectively and the self-awareness which we have of ourselves subjectively: a discrepancy which probably makes it impossible for us to ever arrive at the truth" (155).

The first part of Bradley's narrative reveals a "subjective" self-awareness as, "feeling the proximity of enlightenment" (37), he is about to leave for a seaside retreat where he hopes to be able to break his writer's block. The hectic juxtaposition of crises that prevent him from leaving is perceived by Bradley as a sort of cosmic plot against his projected artistic fruition; after having been embroiled in the dreadful aftermath of the quarrel between his married friends Arnold and Rachel Baffin, he has (presciently) "a superstitious feeling that if I did not make my escape...something would grab me" (28). This is an ironic counterpart to the tessellated crises of Part One - ex-brother-in-law Francis arrives with news of Bradley's ex-wife, Christian's, return; Arnold phones to say he thinks he has murdered Rachel; his sister Priscilla appears, on the verge of a breakdown after leaving her husband - the "plotted" feel of which is reinforced by the rapid "cutting" between dramatic scenes of dialogue and explication, and passages of self-narration. In this way, we too are ensnared in the events of the "plot" and subtly made to "read"

them initially as Bradley does. The contrast, however, between this consonant presentation of self and his actions and responses to others serves as a "character-ising" device that prefigures the dissonant commentary of the authorial self, disrupting this primary reading. Despite a description of himself as "gentle to timidity" (xvi), a seeker and a perfectionist, Bradley displays a relentless self-interest in the face of these initial troubles, identifying them with an alien power destructive of his creativity: "I had within me at last a great book. There was a fearful urgency about it. I needed darkness, purity, solitude. This was not a time for wasting with the trivia of superficial planning and *ad hoc* rescue operations and annoying interviews" (97).

This portentous declaration, with its denigration of the messy affairs of others, comes shortly after he has enmeshed himself further in the Baffin drama through a quasi-sexual encounter with Rachel, and discovered the real pitiability of Priscilla's estranged situation on his recovery mission to her house in Bristol, where her husband has installed his much younger, pregnant mistress. The authority of the statement invites us to acquiesce in Bradley's view of the paramountcy of his artistic vocation, but the consonant narrative almost immediately betrays the coexistence of the human needs that are unacknowledged as the sources of his art, and therefore unable to feed into the creative act: "I let Francis into my house because Rachel had kissed me. At that stage, a fluid all-conquering confidence was still making me feel benevolent and full of power. Also I wanted a drinking companion, I wanted for once to *chatter*" (97). When Bradley early on, in an

iterative quarrel with Arnold, declares that "Art isn't chat plus fantasy. Art comes out of endless restraint and silence" (26), Arnold rightly replies that "If the silence is endless there isn't any art". This self-same debate is here demonstrated through the "unwitting" contradictions of the narrative in the consequent expression of a need for "silence" and a desire to "chatter", and is later explicated by the narrating voice: "any artist knows that the space between the stage where the work is too unformed to have committed itself and the stage where it is too late to improve it can be as thin as a needle. Genius perhaps consists in opening out this needle-like area until it covers almost the whole of the working time" (154).

This comment is made in the course of a narratorial meditation upon virtue and its relation to art and morality that immediately precedes Bradley's realisation of his love for Julian. In this last section of Part One, Murdoch employs the two poles of self-narration to both heighten the pace and excitement of the story, and to mediate its reception: the climactic final scene comes after this dissonant retrospective analysis, and achieves much of its effect by offering a consonant, dramatic "re-presentation" of the moment through a dialogue that subtly takes up the anterior ideas. In the course of a "tutorial" on *Hamlet*, Bradley perceives his condition through and in his ability to articulate the peculiar nature of Shakespeare's achievement in this play, "speaking as few artists can speak, in the first person and yet at the pinnacle of artifice" (164).

"*Hamlet* is nearer to the wind than Shakespeare ever sailed, even in his sonnets. Did Shakespeare hate his father? Of course. Was he in love with his mother? Of course. But that is only the beginning of what he is telling us about himself. How does he dare to do it? How can he not bring down on his head a punishment which is as much more exquisite than that of ordinary writers as the god whom he worships is above the god whom they worship? He has performed a supreme creative feat, a work endlessly reflecting upon itself, not discursively, but in its very substance, a Chinese box of words as high as the tower of Babel, a meditation upon the bottomless trickery of consciousness and the redemptive role of words in the lives of those without identity, that is human beings. *Hamlet* is words, and so is Hamlet. (163-4)

Here Bradley - and Murdoch too - speak "in the first person and yet at the pinnacle of artifice"; the extraordinary eloquence and originality of the disquisition reminiscent of the soliloquising narrating-self, yet also wildly digressive from the "character" so far exhibited. Murdoch has remarked that she feels the presence of Shakespeare in *Hamlet* "as a kind of trembling emotional excitement" (Bellamy, 132), and the self-referentiality that Bradley comments upon in that play might be taken to apply to her own novel too. One might perhaps say that *The Black Prince* is words, and so is the Bradley Pe(a)rson(a), but that for all that, as in Shakespeare's work, the words succeed brilliantly in conferring identity. A self-referentiality is suggested in another way by the appropriateness of Bradley's reading of *Hamlet* for our own reading of the novel that he narrates ("The Black Prince"), as well as to the novel in which he is "the narrator" (*The Black Prince*): both *Hamlet* and this text "invite and require a Freudian reading, and neither can be satisfied or exhausted by it" (Conradi, 196). As he puts it to Julian: "It is true but it doesn't matter. A sophisticated reader takes such things in his stride" (162).

As much as Julian, the reader here undergoes tutelage in sophisticated critical evaluation: eschewing any retrospective or narrative commentary, his unabashedly eloquent and difficult interpretations force the reader to attend to the text with the same "immediacy"/un-mediacy that Bradley extends to *Hamlet*. The consonant presentation of these ideas paradoxically enables a demonstration of a momentary transcendence of the consonant persona; Bradley suddenly appears to be speaking "out of character" and offering us "in-sight" into both self and subject in a way that is comparable in its effect to the persuasive artificiality of Hamlet's soliloquies. We are thus directed to "read" him anew, and to differently feel the effects of his strong persona(lity) in a way that suggests how Julian might see him. The deliberate selectivity of reportage in this scene ultimately works interestingly to defer its "meaning" for Bradley while indicating "meanings" of Bradley, although the opening of Part Two ingenuously assumes that "What it was that had happened the percipient reader will not need to be told. (Doubtless he saw it coming a mile off. I did not. This is art, but I was out there in life)" (169). The effect, however, of the artfully "realistic" limitation of our knowledge of the consciousness of another, is to make us feel "out there in life" despite a pervasive sense that "this is art".

Part Two enacts "the whole history of 'being in love'" (204), demonstrating a partially real and partially delusive experience of asceticism through a similarly mixed narrative mode. As in the first part, the narrating voice regularly intercepts, "irradiating" and modifying Bradley's lyrical and self-absorbed description of his

"condition". In this section, however, the retrospective vision colludes with rather than works against the story, leaving any apprehension of Bradley's insensitivity to and misprision of others to arise from the "evidence" of dialogue and event. This collusion implies a narratorial sanctioning of the validity of his experience that is reinforced by an early anticipation of readerly scepticism and reductive interpretation:

....those who have never fallen desperately in love with someone whom they have known for a long time may doubt whether this can occur. Let me assure them that it can. It happened to me. (169)

Some readers may feel that what I am describing is a condition of insanity, and in a way this is true. (171)

I spoke earlier in this rigmarole of my whole life travelling towards what had now occurred. Perhaps my friend the percipient reader may be excused for having interpreted this conception in the following terms: that all this dream of being a great artist was simply a search for a great human love....I should say at once that this was not my case. (172)

The reader, especially if he has not had the experience I have been describing, may feel impatient with the foregoing lyricism. "Pshaw!" he will say, "the fellow protests too much and intoxicates himself with words....All he means is that he suddenly felt intense sexual desire for a girl of twenty"....I will not pause to answer this reader back. (173)

In the opening pages of the novel, Bradley describes Francis Marloe as belonging "to that sad crew of semi-educated theorizers who prefer any general blunted 'symbolic' explanation to the horror of confronting a unique human history" (xiv). Uniqueness is insisted upon here through and by the intense "peculiarity" of the feelings, but it is interesting to note that Bradley does not answer back to the "explanation" that implies the gap between

"words" and "feeling". As he initially notes, in an echo of Wallace Stevens, language does mark the moment of division from that which it seeks to render: "'I had fallen in love with Julian.' The words are easily written down. But how to describe the thing itself?" (169).³²

Try, however, he does, fulfilling the promissory subtitle of his novel and demonstrating the way in which Eros transfigures his world. "Is the real like this, *is it this?*" (54), he early ponders in a consideration of "truth" in art, and this section abounds with attempts to answer the question. The experience of "absolute love", the loss of self and concomitant apprehension of the world, the presence of the sexual within the spiritual, the strangeness of sleep and tears, the horror of jealousy, even the sensation of vomiting; all of these and more are brilliantly evoked, and convey both a consonant state of mind and "truthful" perception through the constant validation and modification of such descriptions by the eloquent narrating voice:

...what I experienced that evening on the Post Office Tower was a kind of blinding joy. It was as if stars were exploding in front of my eyes so that I literally could not see. Breathing was fast and difficult, not unpleasant. I was conscious of a certain satisfaction in being able to go on pumping myself full of oxygen. A quiet and perhaps outwardly perceptible shuddering possessed my whole frame. My hands vibrated, my legs ached and throbbed, my knees were in the condition described by the Greek poetess.....These are the merest physical symptoms. *They* can readily be sketched in words. But how to convey the rapture of the mind, as it mingles with the body, draws apart into itself, and mingles again, in a wild and yet grateful dance? (200)

³². See Stevens's "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself", Stevens, Wallace, *Collected Poems*. Faber and Faber: London and Boston, 534.

As is true for its general formal construction, the incorporation of "fictive" self-doubt here serves to reinforce the illusion of the real: we are made to simultaneously identify with both the consonant and dissonant narrating voices as we are engaged in the concrete detail of the feelings and the perception of the impossibility of "real-ly" expressing them linguistically. Here, as elsewhere, this perception "allows" a cross-over into a substitutive poetic and metaphoric language:

My body ached with a painful delightful sensation of desire and gratified desire, somehow merged into a single mode of being. I groaned softly over myself. I was made of something else, something delicious, in which consciousness throbbed in a warm daze. I was made of honey and fudge and marzipan, and at the same time I was made of steel. I was a steel wire vibrating quietly in the midst of blue emptiness. These words do not of course convey my sensations, no words could. I did not think. I was. (231)

Bradley's ability to use this kind of language in coexistence with an admission of its "superfluosness" points to the artistic development of the blocked, neurotic experiencing-self of the novel's opening, who implies that he would rather wait mutely all his life than "profane the purity of a single page....with anything less than what is true" (xii). It also confirms his early intuition, after Rachel makes sexual overtures to him, of writerly liberation through the visitation of Eros: "was this perhaps in an unexpected form the opening itself of my long-awaited 'break through', my passage into another world, into the presence of the god?" (112). His subsequent impotence in bed with her is paralleled by the controlled and analytical description of the event, suggesting that this failure of "low" Eros is also an image

of his failure as an artist and distance from "the presence of the god". Bradley's premonition of change is, however, sound, although as the narrating-self remarks, "the happening may be curiously different from its prefigurement" (113). The difference is underlined in the later passage by the expansion and relaxation of Bradley's creative "vocabulary" and techniques, which formally reinforce the validity of his sense, upon recognising his love for Julian, that "She had filled me with a previously unimaginable power which I knew that I would and could use in my art" (172).

The urgency and intensity of the focus upon Julian is heightened by this additional descriptive "power", but essentially conveyed by the narrative inattention to the other "characters": although Bradley several times mentions Francis's pleas that he visit and help Priscilla, he does not discuss her obvious plight or his duties in this regard, and appears to take Christian's hospitality to, and Francis's care for her wholly for granted. He similarly mentions but then ignores the fact that Rachel seems to be "in some state of emotion" (215) that is related to him, and Arnold's astonishing epistolary confession of love for Christian merely elicits the comment that "love can so deaden one to external matters that I might as well have been perusing the laundry bill" (215). The mutation of other "voices" to telephone calls and letters is the narrative equivalent of Bradley's inability to "see" anyone other than Julian, and exerts an equivalent pressure upon the reader to dismiss the implications of any information that is "extraneous" to this central affair. Arnold's similarly unlikely "fall" does, however, ironise Bradley's solipsism through its

symbolic equivalence, and point to the ways in which the apparent loss of self in the loved one is both very real to the protagonists, and an illusory state which "provokes tunnel vision and makes the rest of the world invisible" (Conradi, 203).

Part Three enacts a "real" exclusion of the rest of the world as Bradley flees with Julian from her parents' fury to *Patara*, the seaside cottage for which he was about to leave at the start of the story. The consonant narrative keeps us wholly within their briefly idyllic existence, and is tellingly retained even after the obtrusion of the external world when Francis manages to contact Bradley to tell him of Priscilla's suicide:

Of course I was stricken with guilt and horror at my unforgivable failure to keep my dear sister alive. But as I drove along I was also employed in minute calculations about the immediate future. I was perhaps absurdly influenced by the idea that it was a pure accident, a mere contingent by-product of my carelessness, that Francis had known where to find me. And if that terrible telephone call had been so little determined, so casually caused, it made it seem that much less real, that much easier to obliterate from history. In acting as if it had not happened I was scarcely distorting the real course of events at all....Anyway, there was nothing more I could do for Priscilla. (278)

The formulaic language of the first line ("stricken with guilt", "my unforgivable failure", "my dear sister"), evidences Bradley's suppression of a real response to Priscilla's death, as does the subsuming of a tentative retrospective analysis of events ("I was perhaps absurdly influenced...") by a relentlessly purposive ratiocination that allows him to reject "the simple and obvious promptings of duty" (278). The rhetoric of self-persuasion by which Bradley convinces himself that his failure to make love to

Julian is "a symbol of the whole dilemma", "*the next obstacle*" (279) serves to bind us to its internal logic through the consonant enactment of its own processes: "I had already *of course* decided not to tell Julian....if we left our refuge now....the process *which would* ensure our liberation from doubt and our eternal betrothal might never take place at all. It was something which, for both of us, *I had to do*, it was my *destined ordeal* to keep silent" (279, my emphases). The instinctive decision ("of course") is immediately validated by a rationale that invokes the language and significance of myth and romance ("liberation", "eternal betrothal", "destined ordeal") in order to blur the realities of a situation that is far from defined or guaranteed in this way. "Emotions cloud the view, and far from isolating the particular, draw generality and even theory in their train" (56), Bradley notes early on, and in conveying a sense of the progression of his thought, the narrative is able to illustrate this principle and suggest the similarly inaccurate generality of the social judgement of his conduct: "His sister dies and he won't leave his love-making" (287), as Arnold puts it.

Arnold's sudden arrival brings with it the presence of the world and the past, coalescing the pattern of inexorable cause and effect that Bradley (as imaged by the consonant narrative) has felt himself to be dis-located from. That the coalescence is of course due to his very attempts to ignore causality in life (not telling Julian about Priscilla or his quasi-affair with Rachel, or correcting the lie about his age), is the grand irony of the novel that allegorises the fictional irony of "realism" as the successful

concealment of formal organisation: by conceiving of his love for Julian as "on a different plane" (305) from, and able to exist independently of ordinary life, Bradley creates the circumstances which ensnare him in the "total dense mesh of tiny interconnections" (95) that make up daily "reality", and which also form the "plot" of the novel. The link between a perception of the interconnectedness of action and consequence, self and others, and the achievement of moral and artistic worth, has been asserted throughout by the narrating voice:

In art, as in morality, great things go by the board because at the crucial moment we blink our eyes. When is the crucial moment? Greatness is to recognize it and be able to hold it and to extend it....Thus works of art, and thus whole lives of men, are spoilt by blinking and moving quickly on. (xiii)

There are no spare unrecorded encapsulated moments in which we can behave "anyhow" and then expect to resume life where we left off. (95)

As I said at the beginning, any artist knows that the space between the stage where the work is too unformed to have committed itself and the stage where it is too late to improve it can be as thin as a needle. Genius perhaps consists in opening out this needle-like area until it covers almost the whole of the working time....There is an analogous transition in the everyday proceedings of the moral agent. We ignore what we are doing until it is too late to alter it....Perhaps some kind of integrity of the imagination, a sort of moral genius, could verify the scene, producing minute sensibility and control of the moment as a function of some much larger consciousness. Can there be a *natural*, as it were Shakespearian felicity in the moral life? (155)

In this last section of his tale, Bradley's consonant realisation of the connection between a continuous sense of self and one's moral and artistic output is part of the "story", and thus Part Three demonstrates the coincidence of the two voices that (in)form

the tale. The analysis of events that follows Julian's flight from Patara and Bradley's return to London is marked by the self-conscious attention to scrupulous re-presentation and the clarity of perception that characterises the narrating voice, as well as enacting the immediate emotional torment:

My state of mind, which I shall in a moment attempt to describe, is not easily conveyed. I felt that if I could not build a pattern of at least plausible beliefs to make some just bearable sense out of what had happened I should die. Though I suppose that what I was conceiving was not true death, but a torture to which death would be preferable. How could I live with the idea that she had simply left me in the night without a word? It could not be. (300)

The narration here conveys both Bradley's mental anguish, and his concomitant understanding of the human need for "plausible beliefs" and "patterns" in order to make sense of existence. This consonant insight echoes (and by implication "prefigures") the narratorial preoccupation with the problematic relationship between form and reality that punctuates the novel, and so its consequent amendment ("Though I suppose...") amplifies the feelings that underlie the rhetorical question and answer of the experiencing self, rather than distancing us from them.

This "sympathy" between the narrative voices suggests that a deeper and truer ascesis has followed the partial loss of self of Part Two. In a shattered state after rapidly destroying Arnold's entire oeuvre in an act of compensatory (and prophetic) violence, Bradley perceives the way in which the experience of love should extend rather than delimit one's capacity to love: "Because I love Julian I ought to be able to love everybody. I will be able to one

day" (315). Believably, however, egoism reasserts itself, and on receiving Julian's inept letter of parting, Bradley manifests a need to construct a pattern of self-supportive beliefs that is shown to be unattended by his former insight:

The letter had, of course, been written for Arnold's eye....She had continued writing a vague repetitive effusion, in the hope of being able to put in a real message at the last moment, hence the references to "not being able to end"....she had also managed to convey her destination. "Snow and ice", to which she had drawn attention, patently meant Venice. The Italian for "snow" is "nerve", and together with the reference to "Italian words", the anagram was obvious. (321)

The "implausibility" of this relentlessly focused "reading" makes it clear that, despite the tone of authoritative rationality, these are the delusions of the time-bound character, spinning a plot out of the self rather than attending to the reality with which he is "literally" confronted. The seizure by the "real" plot - that is "the real" - thus takes him completely by surprise; as he proleptically notes in a clichéd phrase that comically predicts his subsequent interpretive activity, "it was not anything that I could have conceived of in my wildest imaginings" (317).

The neat symmetry of concluding "The Black Prince" with Rachel's call to Bradley and his arrest for the murder of Arnold, is unlikely to have been part of readerly expectation either. By foregrounding the formal design through an almost purely consonant, "realistic" rendering of a bizarrely improbable compound of circumstances, Murdoch achieves an ingenious conjunction of realism and illusionism that effectively duplicates the shocking surprise and unreality that events must have here for Bradley without overt

and disjunctive commentary from the retrospective self. We are left in the "present" of the story with the police's repetitive question - "Why did you do it?" - predominating over his already perceptibly ineffectual replies and so indicating the turn that events will take.

"The story is over" (329), as Bradley says in his postscript, but the "story" is not: we learn from the addenda to the tale that he is given life imprisonment for the murder of Arnold and dies of cancer in prison, attended by Loxias. Bradley's postscript provides a brief account of the trial by way of a discussion of its "meaning" for him, and if its remorseless and mechanical injustice reminds us of Kafka's trial, so is Joseph K.'s dislocated sense of culpability echoed by Bradley's comment that he felt "almost mad with guilt, with a sort of general guilt about my whole life" (331). His interpretation of the trial as both evocative of and designed for this guilt, as "a sizeable ordeal labelled with my name" (331), alters the apparent focus of his story from the transformation of self through the "trials" of love to the true metamorphosis through this "real" trial. From "the vantage point" of his "new consciousness" (331), Bradley elaborates upon the way in which he feels that the "public drama and horror was a necessary and in some deep sense natural outcome of the visitation with which I had been honoured" (336); that is, his love for Julian:

Human love is the gateway to all knowledge, as Plato understood. And through the door that Julian opened my being passed into another world.

When I thought earlier that my ability to love her was my ability to write, my ability to exist at last as the artist I

had disciplined my life to be, I was in the truth, but knew it only darkly (337).

The eloquence and authority of the Postscript takes much from the dissolution and incorporation of the "discrete" narrative levels within an enlarged narrating voice, as for the first time it speaks without reference to an enclosing context and within the temporal framework of the novel. Human love is, as the subtitle promises, celebrated in and for itself in Bradley's tale, but it is Loxias's definition of love as the image of "man's creative struggle...for wisdom and truth" (ix) that is articulated in his postscript, providing an image of his creative metamorphosis through its own movement out of an autobiographical mode. Far from a traditional summation that "explains" the self in terms of the past, the postscript points at the way in which the formal properties of art can only feign aesthetic unity:³³

"This little book is important to me and I have written it as simply and as truthfully as I can. What kind of thing it is dark to me as I am dark to myself. The mechanical aspects of our humanity remain obscure to us....Every man is tiny and comic to his neighbour. And when he seeks an idea of himself he seeks a false idea" (337).

Bradley remains dark to us too; as Conradi points out, "both his guilt and its "final exorcism" in the trial seem excessive", and

³³. In "Molestation and Authority in Narrative Fiction", Edward Said considers "the institution of narrative prose fiction as a kind of appetite for wanting to modify reality", and remarks that "The sheer length of the classic novel can almost be accounted for by the desire to initiate and promote a reduplication of life and, at the same time, to allow for a convincing portrayal of how that sort of life leads inevitably to the revelation of a merely borrowed authority." (Miller, J. Hillis (ed.), *Aspects of Narrative*. Columbia University Press: New York and London 1971, 48; 62)

his hard-won sense of transcendence and serenity is an "ambiguous apotheosis" that is "untested and untestable in the real world" (208). These uncertainties are in some ways reinforced by the four postscripts by *dramatis personae*, who, although evidently self-motivated in undermining and diminishing Bradley and his account of events, weaken our "dependence" upon the narrating voice through the proffering of these other "points of view": Christian, Rachel and Francis all maintain that Bradley was "really" in love with each of them, while Julian maintains a puzzling silence about the affair and chooses to speak portentously about "art" in a way that offers us little connection to her "character" in "The Black Prince". Finally, however, these aporias provide resonance rather than mystification, a confidence in the endless possibilities of art rather than an exposure of their exhaustion. Realism and formal self-awareness investigate one another tirelessly throughout the novel, the multiple narrative shifts of the novel demonstrating Loxias's different definitions of art as "to do with joy and play and the absurd" (362), and as telling "the only truth that really matters" (364), even if it can only approximate "reality". Hearing that "it has even been suggested that Bradley Pearson and myself are both simply fictions, the inventions of a minor novelist", Loxias offers the "evidence" of the bronze water buffalo lady and the gilt snuff box, and then undercuts such "realism" by attesting to the higher truth of the fiction: "Bradley Pearson's story, which I made him tell, remains too, a kind of thing more durable than these" (364).

CHAPTER FOUR

The meaning of a work (or of a text) cannot be created by the work alone; the author never produces anything but presumptions of meaning, forms, and it is the world which fills them.

Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*.

However sad and awful the things it narrates, the novel belongs to an open world, a world of absurdity and loose ends and ignorance. In real life, that which is horrible lacks the significance of art. The novel is intensely aware of this fact. In fact, particular novelists endeavour very often to close the form by various artifices, to make it more like a poem, and this may work; but I think that the nature of the novel is somehow that a sort of wind blows through it and there are holes in it and the meaning of it partly seeps away into life.

Iris Murdoch.

I contended in the last chapter that the usage of the first-person form in fiction is not just a pragmatic alternative to the potential "transparency" of the third-person voice and omniscient "authority", but also a decision to draw attention to the problems of (self)representation: as Murdoch puts it in the University of Caen address, it is "the disunified self which disunifies the object and the story",¹ and the disjunctions within her particular composition of fictional modes are perhaps for this reason more happily reconciled in the "first(-person) world". I would like now to turn to *The Sea, The Sea* (1978) as the novel that initiates what seems to be a progressive attempt to open the "forms" of the fictional "world" away from their own "presumptions of meaning", and to mark it as a highpoint at which

¹. Murdoch, Iris, "Art is the Imitation of Nature", *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches sur les Pays du Nord et du Nord-Ouest*, no.1, Publications de la Faculté de Lettres et Sciences Humaines de l'Université de Caen 1978, 62.

her work achieves a superb balance between "the world that fills them" and the seepage back "into life". My theoretical approach will follow my interpretive bias, as, in considering what I believe to be an expansion away from the simpler and more rigid forms of the earlier novels, I move from a technically specific discussion of Murdoch's fictional techniques to look at broader questions of formal organisation and genre.

Like *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince*, *The Sea, The Sea* is narrated by a male "artist" who undergoes the tutelage of "the story", and like *The Unicorn*, it is a Gothic story of enclosure and obsession that insistently ironises its own structures in the attempt to "unlock an appropriately contemporary "realism" from the Castle Perilous of romance" (Conradi 1982, 30). The achievement of the later book lies perhaps in its fusion of these two Murdochian fictional "types";² the un(self)conscious attempts of the first-person narrator to legislate meaning exert their usual fascination for the reader at the level of "realistic" characterisation, while also demonstrating the haunting of the self through the mechanisms of fantasy that the presence of the overtly "un-real" modes makes "literal". Unlike the earlier first-person novels, where the retrospective narrator "knows" the story whose "telling" the novel enacts and comments upon, *The Sea, The Sea* employs an apparently indeterminate, "contemporaneous" narrative mode that mixes the forms of diary, "memoir", autobiography and "novel". Since the narrator is not positioned as the "survivor" of the story, enabled and authorised by that set of experiences to begin to record

². Other examples might be *A Severed Head* and *A Word Child* in the first category, and *The Time of the Angels* in the second.

them, his fallibility and consequent education must speak entirely through the form, which is thus made to serve character while providing its own satisfactions and energies in the way that Murdoch has consistently recommended; most popularly for purposes of critical exegesis in "Against Dryness".

This early and influential essay is inevitably alluded to in any discussion of Murdoch's "thought", and its attractively compact thesis of a split in the contemporary novel between a "journalistic" social realism and "crystalline" psychological inwardness is usually cited as if it described two clearly opposed and self-contained fictional forms. Interviewed in 1987, Murdoch said that these terms were appropriate to the time in which the article was written, and were never meant to label "real novels, although of course there are some that one could categorise in this way",³ but rather to describe the "positions" between which the novelist - and the novel - always mediates,⁴ and can sometimes (as in the case of Shakespeare, or the great nineteenth-century writers) integrate. I have already quoted her comment, made almost thirty years earlier in a discussion of her first four fictions, about her desire to combine the "open" novel in which "the characters move about freely", and the "closed", "intensely integrated" novel: possible, perhaps only "if one were a great writer" (Anon, *Bookman*, 26). Ideally, it seems, aesthetic interest should be generated by both form and character, and sustained by a

³. Sulcas, Roslyn, informal interview with Iris Murdoch in February 1987.

⁴. David Lodge discusses this in "The Novelist at the Crossroads", in Bradbury, Malcolm (ed.). *The Novel Today*. Fontana/Collins: Great Britain 1977, 84-110.

dynamic tension between the two: what Murdoch wants in the novels, says Conradi, "is "character" sufficiently strongly embodied to hold its own in living tension with the 'myth' embodied in the plot" (Conradi, 24).

The Sea, The Sea evinces this tension from its very beginnings, as narrator Charles Arrowby, newly-retired famous theatre director, self-consciously speculates about the form that his writings will take after an opening "word picture" (2) of the sea that evokes "the blisses of the romantic novel" (Dipple, 276) while literally and literarily setting the scene. The smooth elegance of his description is immediately belied by a disjunctive second paragraph that exposes its "writing" and intentionality, confirming an initial sense of control and construction, but making this relevant to the hitherto impersonal "I" rather than authorial manipulation: "I had written the above, destined to be the opening paragraph of my memoirs, when something happened that was so extraordinary and so horrible that I cannot bring myself to describe it" (1). This instant rending of the projected form ("memoir" itself suggestive of a selective recording of the past) mimics Charles's mysteriously unpleasant and disruptive experience, and is ironically extended by his vigorous and vaguely comic attempts to impose a shape upon his new enterprise:

I spoke of a memoir. Is that what this chronicle will be? Time will show. At this moment, a page old, it feels more like a diary than a memoir. Well, let it be a diary then. (1)

I have considered writing a journal, not of happenings for there will be none, but as a record of mingled thoughts and daily observations: 'my philosophy', my *pensées* against a background of simple descriptions of the weather and other natural phenomena. This now seems to me again to be a good idea. (2)

Of course there is no need to separate 'memoir' from 'diary' or 'philosophical journal'. I can tell you, reader, about my past life and about my 'world-view' also, as I ramble along. Why not? It can all come out naturally as I reflect. Thus unanxiously (for am I not now leaving anxiety behind?) I shall discover my 'literary form'. In any case, why decide now? Later, if I please, I can regard these ramblings as rough notes for a more coherent account. (2-3)

The effect of this explicit preoccupation with the configuration of the writing is, paradoxically, of a formal "openness" which suggests the narrator's inability to maintain control over the expression of the self, despite visible "anxiety" about giving it a discernable structure and meaning through orthodox form. Murdoch's portrayal here of the attempt to discover/cover the self through literary projection comments subtly upon the line that convention draws between fiction and "reality", without requiring, as does contemporary metafiction, that the two categories be brutally compressed into a discernible indivisibility; indeed, her fictional project might be described as an exploration of the essential differences between these categories through those who almost always confuse the two. As John Bayley puts it in *The Uses of Division*, "the modern reflective consciousness cannot in some sense but see itself as taking part in a novel, the novel being the standard literary reflection of the individual in our age",⁵ and *The Sea, the Sea* demonstrates through Charles how the idea of identity as "character" is "usefully and almost unconsciously extrapolated back into life" (Bayley, 18) in the service of unconscious needs.

⁵. Bayley, John, *The Uses of Division*. Chatto and Windus: London 1976, 18.

That the self is constituted in and by language has been the topic of much contemporary critical discourse, as, following Jacques Lacan's rewriting of Freud's metapsychology, literary theorists have acknowledged the "fictive" unity of the "I" and discredited the possibility of a univocal presentation of the self.⁶ In "The Subversion of the Subject", Lacan writes of the way in which conscious knowledge is "ignorant" of the disturbing truths spoken by the unconscious because it cannot understand the "language" in which these truths are inscribed. The psychoanalyst's task is thus to "decipher a 'structure' in which the unconscious represents itself".⁷ This perfectly describes the way in which the first-person narrator must be ignorant of the play between conscious knowledge and unconscious desire that "structures" his/her own narrative, while the reader engages in an interpretive activity that "deciphers" it. This opening section of *The Sea, The Sea* prepares just such a structure through the disjunctions between Charles's perceptions of his strong desire to write as "necessary" to his new undertaking - to "learn to be good" (2) - and his clear motives of self-definition and self-validation that his ambivalencies about form suggest.

These early indications of his need to retain the power and control that he was legitimately able to exercise in the theatre are amplified by his rhetorical identification with Prospero as he contemplates the

⁶. I have already cited Paul de Man's article on "Autobiography and De-facement"; see also Frederic Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject", *Yale French Studies*, No.55/56, 1977.

⁷. Benvenuto, Bice, and Kennedy, Rodger, *The Works of Jacques Lacan*. Free Association Books: London 1986, 167.

extended renunciation of directorial power into his private life: "Have I abjured that magic, drowned my book? Forgiven my enemies? The surrender of power, the final change of magic into spirit? Time will show" (39). Rather than disclosing a true interest in the disinvestment of illusion and obsession that *The Tempest* enacts, the desire to continue "role-playing" is paradoxically made explicit here through the expression of a renunciatory intent that itself suggests the taking up of a particular posture: in fact that of his "last great role" (39), and the only major Shakespearian character whom Charles considers himself to have successfully acted. "To repent of egoism: is autobiography the best method?" (3), he wonders, unwittingly undermining both the self-authenticating drive and the confessional project by demonstrating the way in which the very act of signification alienates the writing self from the subject. In Julia Kristeva's phrase, "the desire of signifying and the signifying of desire"^a emerge through Charles's writings in the play between the narrative form and his formal intentions, alerting us to his equivocal impulses towards the abdication and acquisition of power and identity.

The motivational ambiguity behind the "need" to write is formally displayed in the opening section of the novel, entitled "Prehistory", which alternates between diary-like reportage of and commentary upon the quotidian, rather self-conscious "memoir" ("My paternal grandfather was a market gardener in Lincolnshire"), and descriptions of friends, family and relationships. Despite oft declared intentions of systematic self-scrutiny through autobiographical inquiry into the

^a. Quoted by Harland, Richard, *Superstructuralism*. Methuen: London and New York 1987, 169.

past, and particularly into his long and formative affair with the much older, famous actress Clement Makin, Charles reveals himself to be consistently unable to impose order upon his narrative: after authoritatively declaring that he will "now describe the house" (7), he delivers a vastly entertaining disquisition on food and cooking, and late at night, concluding that "It is time for bed", finds himself writing about the "horrible" occurrence of the novel's opening; the "real" sighting of a huge green-eyed monster rising from the sea. Similarly, after commenting that "it is not going to be easy to write about the theatre....I had better get straight on to Clement" (32), he offers a description of it that simultaneously introduces us to many of the book's preoccupations and suggests a considerable amount about his personality:

The theatre, even at its most 'realistic', is connected with the level at which, and the methods by which, we tell our everyday lies. This is the sense in which 'ordinary' theatre resembles life, and dramatists are disgraceful liars unless they are very good. On the other hand, in a purely formal sense the theatre is the nearest to poetry of all the arts. I used to think that if I had been a poet I would never have bothered with the theatre at all, but of course this was nonsense. *What I needed with all my starved and silent soul was just that particular way of shouting back at the world.* The theatre is an attack on mankind, carried on by magic: to victimize an audience every night, to make them laugh and cry and suffer and miss their trains....the theatre must, if need be, stoop - and stoop - until it attains that direct, that universal communication which other artists can afford to seek more deviously and at their ease. Hence the assault, the noise, the characteristic impatience. *All this was part of my revenge.*

How vulgar, how almost cruel it was, I gloatingly savour now that I am absolutely out of it at last, now that I can sit in the sun and look at the calm quiet sea. (33-4; my italics)

The Sea, *The Sea* too is concerned with "the level at which, and the methods by which, we tell our everyday lies", and the revelation here of Charles's deep psychic need for power over a contingent world

itself exposes the mendacity of his belief that he is "absolutely out of it at last". One might say that the "methods" that the novel itself uses collude "deviously" to exert an alluring "magic" in the service of such exposure; like the drama, it "stoops" to lure us into its world so as to attain "that direct, that universal communication" that appears to transcend the mechanisms of technique. This is achieved through the skilful deployment of the diary as a "private" writing that is opposed to the various "public" forms mooted by Charles at the start of his narrative. Like the interior monologue, the diary form allows a fragmented and allusive narrative that lends itself naturally to a focus on the present because it conventionally represents a wholly subjective self-communion. Unlike the more contemporary mode, however, it presents itself as a mimetic form whose conventions are themselves "borrowed" by the system of fiction from the system of letters in general. The eclectic subject matter, varying length and differing tone of the opening section's "pieces" accommodates Charles's writing to these conventions, the "artlessness" and a-chronology of the autobiographical excursions effecting their dissolution into the vaguer, apparently more "shapeless" structure. Charles notes that he seems "to be writing everything down all at once in a sort of jumble" (39), but it is this particular juxtaposition of "unmeditated" and "self-conscious" forms that gives depth and resonance to his "character", "showing" him, in Wayne Booth's sense, to be amongst other things witty and intelligent as well as selfish and emotionally manipulative.

The diary thus becomes, by "default", the subsuming form in terms of which the "other" modes are "read", and bestows upon them the validity

acquired through the imitation of a "real" form: it occurs to Charles himself, after rereading his "pieces" about his cousin James and friend Peregrine Arbelow, that he could "write all sorts of fantastic nonsense...in these memoirs and everybody would believe it!" (76). In an examination of the diary as a fictional genre, Lorna Martens notes that the idea of "sincerity" was associated with the nineteenth-century *journal intime* and culminated in an apprehension of the diary as an almost exclusively confessional genre: "the assumption is that because the diarist writes secretly he writes sincerely, and that the self in the diary is the 'true' self and stands in contrast to the outward facade presented to the public".⁹ This view of "man against a background of values, of realities, which transcend him", as Murdoch puts it in "Against Dryness" (26), is clearly in opposition to a poststructuralist conception of the self as essentially unknowable because "pre-scribed" by an unknown "language" rather than by society; a notion which interestingly emerges in *The Sea*, *The Sea* to do battle against Murdoch's own positive evaluation of the former condition. Charles's inability to find or implement a single "representative" form supports his early claim that, despite being described by the press as "a "tyrant", a "tartar"...a "power-crazed monster", he has "in fact very little sense of identity" (3). "I might now introduce myself - to myself, first and foremost, it occurs to me" (3), he writes in the entry after this comment. The suggestion is, that like all Murdoch's power figures, he has played a particular part with the collusion of others, fulfilling their unconscious need to "elect other

⁹. Martens, Lorna, *The diary novel*. Cambridge University Press 1985, 38.

people to play roles in their lives" (Bellamy interview, 138), as well as his own: "I liked that handy picture of myself as a 'tartar'", he remarks. "I fostered my reputation for ruthlessness, it was extremely useful. Actors expected tears and nervous prostration when I was around. Most of them loved it; they are masochists as well as narcissists" (37).

Charles is partly aware that he knows himself only as this "character", and confidently hopes to recover what he perceives as the innocent, uncorrupted self "beneath"; "the precious thing that has come with me, as if it were a talisman which I can now unwrap" (4). It is soon clear, however, that "character" does not necessarily change by virtue of an altered "context", and that, for Charles, personal transformation will not be as easily effected as the geographical relocation which he takes as a concrete metaphor for such change:

It is evening. The sea is golden, speckled with white points of light, lapping with a sort of mechanical self-satisfaction under a pale green sky. How huge it is, how empty, this great space for which I have been longing all my life.
Still no letters. (15)

The protestations of solitary contentment and need for "emptiness" are amusingly betrayed here by the final remark, which indicates Charles's lack of dislocation from the "court" of friends over whom he has exercised his power. We learn that the letter that Charles is really awaiting is a response from an ex-mistress, Lizzie Scherer, who is still in love with him, to overtures that he vaguely describes as "a sort of test, or game, or gamble" (41). This careless emotional manipulation proves to be "characteristic"; Lizzie's answering missive

begs him not to use his power to separate her from a sexless but happy, loving relationship with the homosexual Gilbert Opian who "worships" Charles and is similarly afraid of him. "The habit of obeying you is strong in both of us", Lizzie writes. "You could drive us both mad" (46). Later, when "making some notes for a character sketch" (71) of his friend Peregrine Arbelow, he reveals not merely manipulateness, but a real cruelty in the description of his affair with actress Rosina Vamburgh, then Peregrine's wife:

A furious mutual desire for possession dominated the whole affair while it lasted. At one stage she certainly wanted to marry me, whereas I never had the slightest intention of marrying her. I simply wanted her, and the satisfaction of this want involved detaching her permanently from her husband. (72)

A "desire for possession" informs all of Charles's relationships and has clearly been the goading impulse behind his successful career: the creation of a power figure is in fact particularly effective in *The Sea, The Sea* because the mechanisms of the power are so believably grounded in Charles's history in the theatre, rather than an imponderable "given" as happens in *The Flight From the Enchanter*, *A Severed Head* or *The Unicorn*. The roots of the psychological need and greed evident in his description of the theatre are indicated, in turn, by his evocation of childhood into which "all the idealism of his emotional energy" (Dipple, 280) is projected, and where indeed it resides. Particularly firmly in residence is his belief in the supreme experience and importance of his adolescent love-affair with Mary Hartley Smith, which he describes as "the most important thing in my life", and in a manner that is instructively dependent upon literary conventions and clichés about love: "*On n'aime qu'une fois*,

la première" (77). Hartley, as he calls her, broke off their relationship for reasons that he was, and still is, unable to fathom, and he describes this rejection as making "a permanent metaphysical crisis" of his life. The portrayal of their youthful affair is invested with an amount of emotion that indicates its real importance and "truth" for the young Charles, but also its power as a structure by means of which he has orientated the rest of his life: "Hartley destroyed my innocence, she and the demon of jealousy. She made me faithless. But with her I would have been faithful, with her my whole life would have been different, less rootless, less empty" (84).

This obsessive belief in the permanent scarring caused by Hartley's defection has allowed Charles to refuse to take responsibility for subsequent relationships and deeply motivates his need to retain emotional control over any personal connection, no matter how badly or cruelly he has behaved. (Peregrine, he tells us casually, "remains very attached to me, and I value this" (74)). As Dipple says, "Charles's whole middle history can be seen as a revenge, a shouting back at the world which had recalcitrantly refused his deep childhood longings" (281), but the point is perhaps that at one level this is precisely how Charles sees it. "What style can I adopt or master worthy of such a *sacred tale*?" (77; my emphasis), he asks himself at the outset, unconsciously betraying the idealisation and construction at work in its recollection. The values of purity and innocence that he determinedly invests in this particular section of his past are seen by Charles as recuperable through the recollection of the past that he feels his retirement to the sea to have provoked: by the end of his attempt to tell the "sacred tale", Charles feels "calmer now

already about Hartley, as if the thought of her has somehow been mercifully absorbed into the "sane open air" of his "new environment" (88-9). The way in which he has identified the lost love and golden age of youth with a notion of redeeming its virtue and happiness in "a glorious Act V" (Dipple, 281) of life is made clear at the end of the emotional recollection which ends "Prehistory", and which we can retrospectively see as a pre-lapsarian idealism that "History" will teach Charles to forego: "I left in store with that first love so much of my innocence and gentleness which I later destroyed and denied, *and which is yet now perhaps at last available again*. Can a woman's ghost, after so many years, open the doors of the heart?" (89; my emphasis)

The heightened emotion and consequent intuitions of emotional redemption that attend the telling of the Hartley tale is sharply undercut by the change in tone that marks the start of the novel's central section. "History" opens in an overtly retrospective vein that confirms its appellation and immediately suggests a narrative teleology and "point" that the first section has eschewed: "I did not look at the crabs after all. I became obsessed with the idea of carrying a chair and table out to the tower..." (91). Charles goes on to detail the arrival of Gilbert Opian, who has come to ask him to acknowledge and respect the reality of his new relationship with Lizzie, and then of Lizzie herself, whom he dismisses with the injunction to "get rid of Gilbert" if she ever wants to see him again. We are brought back to the narrative present as Charles explains that he has just written all of this "as a story": "it has somehow excited and pleased me to put it down in this way. If one had time to write

the whole of one's life thus bit by bit as a novel how rewarding this would be" (99). This prepares the way for the following six parts of "History", in which Charles's initial idyllic prediction of a journal that records "not...happenings for there will be none, but...mingled thoughts and daily observations", gives way to the narration of a "history" that will conclusively disprove such confidence in the ability to control and step outside of experience.

Various unpleasant "happenings" have, in fact, already permeated "Prehistory" in the intrusive and uncanny manner of the sea-monster sighting: a "remarkably hideous" green vase shatters without apparent cause, as does a beautiful old mirror; a face peers from the window of an inner room in the house. Significantly, some of these are explained by the appearance of Rosina, who has set out to "haunt" Charles as revenge for his current overtures to Lizzie, for whom he abandoned her in the past. Her intense jealousy and expressions of hatred make clear the delusory nature of his selective attempt to eradicate "history", both by their "haunting" of his newly acquired solitude, and by their palpable manifestation of the controlling emotions that we have intuited in Charles, and which make him such an unfit candidate for asceticism. That he subconsciously recognises and identifies with Rosina's violent emotions is indicated by his momentary perception of her in an early meeting "with the snake-like head and teeth and pink opening mouth" of "his" sea-monster; a subtle linkage of hauntings that blurs the question as to which are "real". "I suppose it was not really a vision but just a thought", he comments, seemingly unaware of the implications: "My nerves were still terribly on edge" (105). Similarly, he notes that his persistent

memory of Hartley seems to "'body her forth'", so that he sees "shadow forms of her imposed on quite different women" (86).

The incomplete rationalisation of the uncanny thus partly services the sense of realism that the diary form has helped to evoke, and partly anticipates the uncanniness of the "real" events to follow. Charles discovers that one of the phantom Hartleys, "an old woman in the village" on whom he sees "a transient look of her head placed like a mask on someone quite different" (86), is in fact his lost childhood love. Writing "the story of Rosina's arrival and what happened just after it" (111) from his London flat, he reveals the full force of his obsession as he describes his reaction to Hartley's ordinary elderly dowdiness and suburban existence in terms that are clearly a product of his deepest longings rather than a perception of reality. "Hartley", now called by her rather less romantic first name of Mary, lives in the village and is married to a retired ex-soldier and salesman, Benjamin Fitch. They have an eighteen-year old adopted son, Titus (who has been missing for two years) and live in a bungalow called "Nibletts". The account of their awkward early meetings demonstrates the inappropriateness to this quotidian present of Charles's frenzied attempts to renew the emotional intensity of their youthful relationship. Hartley, as he persists in calling her (rather comically noting with triumph that Ben does not know her "real" name), shows no desire to resume any kind of friendship with Charles, but he is simply unable to comprehend this and is driven by the force of his obsessive love to "deduce" her marital unhappiness. When Ben clumsily, and with some measure of aggression, tells Charles to leave

them alone, this assumption is happily allowed to extend to her desperate need of rescue from the imprisoning cage of her marriage:

As the violent feelings became calmer another emotion, darker, deeper, came slowly up from below....I had been attempting to block out altogether certain reactions to the situation, certain pictures, certain terrible sensations. The other emotion which now...rose dark and gleaming to the surface was: a kind of frightful *glee*. Ben was just as I had - feared - and hoped. He was a hateful tyrant. He was a thoroughly nasty man. And so...And so... (152)

Consonant self-narration gives way here to self-narrated monologue, holding us in the temporal domain of the tale and demonstrating the transmutation of clearly subjective emotions into purportedly "factual" statements: "He was a hateful tyrant. He was a thoroughly nasty man". These qualities that Charles attributes to Ben are of course the very descriptions of himself that he has early disavowed, and again, the act of projection is suggested by his illustration of his emotions as an externalisation of the terrifying vision of the sea-monster, rising "dark and gleaming to the surface". Hartley, on the other hand, is imaged as the Good itself through the Platonic metaphor of the "one great light" (77) in the dark cavern of the mind.¹⁰ "Perhaps I would indeed", he writes after their first meeting, "through her and through our old childish love...be enabled to become what I had hoped to become when I came away to the sea, pure in heart" (122). The workings of the psyche that these different wish-fulfillments indicate are re-enacted at the narrative level by the change from naturalistic representation to an overtly "fictional"

¹⁰. Conradi makes this point, noting that "all forms of 'absolute' metaphysic in Murdoch's work are vulnerable, as in life" (245).

mode, "explained" by Charles in a reversion to the diary form that breaks into his past tense narrative:

So much has been happening, I thought I would write it as a continuous narrative without too many reversions to the present tense. So I am writing my life, after all, as a novel! Why not? It was a matter of finding a form, and somehow history, my history, has found the form for me. There will be plenty of time to reflect and remember as I go along, to digress and philosophize, to inhabit the far past or depict the scarcely formulated present; so my novel can still be a sort of memoir and a sort of diary. The past and the present are after all so close, so almost one, as if time were an artificial teasing out of a material which longs to join" (153).

Intruding upon the narrative at a particularly suspenseful point, the explanation both "naturalises" the previous "novel-ty" of presentation, and points up the fallacious sense of "authority" and control evoked by the use of the past tense: we are reminded that the narrating self is the still-experiencing self, writing the story under the influence of its events. This rapid transformation of experience into a formulated narrative betrays the desire for a coherent life "story" that has already been revealed by Charles in "Prehistory", and is further suggested here in the appropriation of the in-formal eclecticism of his diary by the "fictional": "So I am writing my life, after all, as a novel!" His sense that Hartley's miraculous reappearance has bestowed this appropriate "form" and meaning upon his life contrasts with our sense of its "fictiveness" as such a governing principle. "I want to do the deep thing, real analysis, real autobiography" (175), he tells his cousin James, who gently points out that one cannot just "walk into the cavern and look around. Most of what we think we know about our minds is pseudo-knowledge....As we

know ourselves we are fake objects, fakes, bundles of illusion."
(175)

James's words are given added resonance by immediately following Charles's viewing of Titian's *Perseus and Andromeda* at the Wallace Collection in London, where, feeling hungover and "unreal" after a drunken evening with Peregrine, he is beguiling the time until his evening train home. He notices in the painting "his" sea monster in the mouth of the dragon upon which Perseus flies; an image which he implicitly identifies with his desire to "save" Hartley from Ben, but which might also be allegorically read as Charles's "propulsion" by the force of his own illusions. This is given subtle weighting by the coincidental appearance of his cousin, who has figured as a central source of envy and jealousy in Charles's recollections of his childhood: another projected, fictional "picture" of events that reveals the power and consequent reality of such "illusions", and which confirms James's deprecating view of the potential for self-knowledge:

"We are all so good at inflating the importance of what we think we value. The heroes at Troy fought for a phantom Helen, according to Stesichorus....If even a dog's tooth is truly worshipped it glows with light. The venerated object is endowed with power, that is the simple sense of the ontological proof" (175).

This can clearly be set against Charles's belief in the illumining of his own mind's "cavern" by the "one great light" of his love for Hartley, and when in the subsequent conversation he finds himself unintentionally speaking of his reawakened love, James perceives both the element of fantasy in this attachment to a past ideal and the

potential reality of its effects on the present: "I cannot attach much meaning to your idea of such a long-lasting love for someone you lost sight of so long ago. Perhaps it's something you've invented now. Though of course what follows from *that* is another matter" (178).

The rest of "History" is devoted to what follows from "that", and its exploration of the myth-making powers of the imagination is appropriately mediated through a decreasingly "naturalised" narrative. An overheard dialogue between Hartley and Ben is interpreted by Charles as "exactly the evidence" (200) that he has wanted to confirm her need of "rescue"; the implausibility of the perfect reportage partly explained by the foregrounding of Charles's own auditive prejudice: "I have written this out as I remember it" (199), he writes, "as in a play". Ben's jealous bullying and Hartley's reiterated apologies are in fact an extended version of an early dialogue between Charles and Lizzie, and as clearly a part of a habituated and structured relationship in which certain roles are ritually enacted. Charles partly recognises "a sense of the strength and texture of the cage" (201) in the awful quarrel, but it is his perception of her as encaged that predominates and points to his own "incarceration" of her memory: "In many ways my life in the theatre now seems like a dream, the old days with you the only reality. I have few friends and no 'amorous ties', I am alone and free" (204), he writes in a letter that begs Hartley to end her "suffering" by leaving her "tyrannical" and "violent" husband and coming to him.

The evident untruth of this self-description again marks the gap between conscious perception and unconscious motivation, highlighted by the last of the "diary's" interjections:

As I write this now it is the next day, and the letter to Hartley in its fat envelope still lies upon my sea-facing table in the drawing-room. I have been writing this diary during the morning. Soon I shall have lunch: the remains of the corned beef with plain boiled onions....Why am I delaying, waiting? Why am I almost pretending that life is ordinary, that it is as it once was? (206)

This last "truly" consonant moment of "History" indeed marks the final vestiges of "ordinariness" and the point at which "history" does finally take over the narrative: from here until the end of this section, the story proceeds without "interruption" from the present while making use of the interplay between the experiencing and narrating selves to develop and sustain the intensity of tension and pace. Hartley does come to Charles, but only to tell him of Ben's irrationally jealous belief that he is the father of Titus, whom the Fitches adopted after a lengthy separation while Hartley was nursing her father. A long and impassioned conversation juxtaposes her desperate, muddled attempts to impress upon Charles the necessity of leaving them well alone against his declamatory statements of love and injunctions to abandon her husband that quite literally ignore her words; a technique repeated throughout this section and which offers us the full contrast between the force of Charles's obsession and the truth that it shuns without needing to invoke narratorial hindsight. "That's what mad people do, see everything as evidence for what they want to believe" (223), he replies to Hartley's tale of Ben's jealous suspicions, while exhibiting precisely this same symptom of psychic

self-defense against a reality that threatens to inflict pain and loss:

I let memories from the far past come and go as they would. But about the terrible present and the gulf of those suffering years my imagination was squeamish and discreet....So I reverted to the past when she was the unspoilt focus of my innocent love, seeing her as she had been when she seemed my future, my whole life, that life which had been taken away from me and yet still seemed to exist somewhere as a packaged stolen possibility. (245)

The combination here of retrospective reportage ("I let memories from the far past come and go") and self-narrated monologue ("But about the terrible present") is a complex one that creates an extensive time-frame in which a sense of the "terrible present", a sense of that "present" perspective on the "past", and of the past vision of the "future" is evoked. Extended consonant narration of this kind enmeshes us in the obsessive and diligent workings of Charles's imagination, creating an atmosphere of intense subjectivity that partly legitimises his fantasy by strongly suggesting its "truth" and relevance for him. This is subtly reinforced by the dissonant interjection that opens Part Four with an assurance of the sustained mimetic "integrity" of re-presentation invoked earlier by the diary form:

What follows this, and also what directly precedes it, has been written at a much later date. What I have now written is therefore more deeply reflected and more systematically remembered than it would be if I were continuing to write a diary. Events, as it happened, did not leave me much time for diary-writing, although what immediately follows has something of the air of an interlude (perhaps a comic one). This novelistic memoir, as it has now become, is however, as far as its facts are concerned (although, as James would say, what indeed are facts?), accurate and truthful. I have in particular, and this may be a professional attribute, an extremely good memory for dialogue, and I am sure that a tape-recording of my candlelit conversation with Hartley would differ but little from what I have

transcribed. My account is curtailed, but omits nothing of substance and faithfully narrates the actual words spoken. How very deeply indeed many of the conversations, past and to come, recorded in this book, are engraved upon my mind and my heart! (239)

While offering the assurance of verity that is traditional to realism, the insistence here on accuracy and truthfulness has far more to do with the imaginative verification of "mind" and "heart" than with the validity of the "facts": the business-like statements of this testament to "realism" are, in effect, subordinated to the final emotive exclamation of its imaginative "truth", or psychic reality. This last sentence momentarily, and almost exclusively in this section, bridges the gap between the narrating and the experiencing self, retrospectively endorsing the importance and relevance of the consonant experience by attesting to its continued significance "outside" of the time-bound story. Located exactly halfway through "History", this assurance of "truthfulness" precedes Charles's definitive return to the life of manipulation and trickery that he has sworn to renounce, as "facts" notwithstanding, he relentlessly enacts the drama of lost and regained love. In this he is unwittingly helped by the unexpected arrival of the runaway Titus, come to discover the truth of Ben's jealous suspicions about his parentage. Charles immediately perceives him to be "the key" (251) to the whole situation, a means of luring Hartley to his house, and also a magical confirmation that the life of peaceful familial happiness that he feels to have been "taken away" from him is imminently recoverable. "You might have been my son", he tells Titus; "in a curious way - because of my old relationship with your mother - I am cast in the role of your father" (261).

The appropriate and revealing theatrical metaphor that Charles uses in this statement to Titus is extended as he "stage-directs" what is to be the virtual abduction of Hartley: "I had told Gilbert the outline of the plan, though part of it I still concealed, even from Titus. Gilbert, who was now to play the key part...was enjoying the whole drama disgracefully" (263). An accelerated narrative pace and heightened coincidence of events accentuate this aura of theatricality as "the plan" is carried out: Hartley is more or less forcibly immured in one of Shruff End's strange inner rooms; Rosina arrives and, enraged by Charles's description of Titus as his son, tells him that she had an abortion soon after he had left her; James and Peregrine turn up almost simultaneously, both claiming an invitation for that weekend. In a review of *The Sea, The Sea*, Margaret Drabble writes that "The bizarre coincidences of the plot and its reverberating imagery have much in common with late Shakespeare - with the severed heads and fake adulteries of *Cymbeline*, the violent jealousies and resurrected queens of *The Winter's Tale*",¹¹ and this stylised concatenation of events has "the bland unconcern with probability of the late romances" (Conradi, 252). Like the later plays too, the novel is openly about the magical powers of the imagination, the ideative realism that informs Charles's obsessive reworking of the past and the present made manifest by its all too real consequences in Hartley's immurement.

This is in turn described in theatrical terms: the "whole history of mental drama" - the "vast developments, changes, checks, surprises,

¹¹. Drabble, Margaret, "Of Treacle Tarts and Eternal Love", *Saturday Review*, 6 January 1979, 52.

progresses, revulsions, crises" (297) that constitute the days of Hartley's incarceration - are presented through a consonant narrative that re-enacts his determined "rewriting" of her continued insistence that she return to Ben.

She was spellbound, bound by a self-protective magic, which she had developed over the years to defend herself against the horrible pain of having married a foul insanely jealous bullying maniac. She had been brainwashed through fear of him, brainwashed by hearing the same things repeated to her again and again, and again. (303)

The irony of his similar enslavement to "a self-protective magic" and of its consequences in precisely the sort of behaviour that is here attributed to Ben, once again suggests the projection of an unconscious self-knowledge that emerges through the formulation of events. This is confirmed by a dream - significantly presented without narrative differentiation - of waking to find that Hartley has hanged herself, and its prompting of a temporary understanding of the enormity of his acts: "What was I doing, or rather what was happening to me?...I had lost control of my life and of the lives with which I was meddling. I felt dread and a terrible fatalism; and bitter grief, grief such as I had never felt in my life since Hartley had left me so many years ago" (310). The linkage here between the early loss of Hartley and his current sense of a "loss of control" suggests that Charles's obsessive need to "direct" and dominate in both his personal and public lives serves as an anaesthetic against, and revenge upon, the pain of the initial deprivation. The potential insight is, however, lost to Charles as the more familiar lines of his own mental drama reassert themselves, and the next morning he convinces himself, without perceiving the contradictions, that "she must want to be free

and happy, everybody did....It was just a matter of waiting and keeping her here and letting time enlighten her will" (311).

The self-delusion of the obsessed imagination is made even clearer after a screaming fit on Hartley's part and the combined efforts of the various witnesses to the situation eventually persuade Charles to return her to Ben; an action that he at first denies responsibility for and then integrates into an overall "strategy":

It was indeed clear that what had happened had been engineered against my will by James. If I had kept my nerve, if I had persevered, if I had only had the sense to take her away right at the start, Hartley would have abandoned herself to me....Perhaps in a way, I reflected, it was just as well to let her go back, this time, for a short period....A dose of Ben, after having been with me, after having had the seeds of liberty sown in her mind, might well wake her up to the possibility, then the compelling desirability of escape. (357)

The process by which Charles is able to rationalise the obvious failure of his attempt to recover Hartley's love is re-enacted through this consonant evocation of his immediate reactions: self-narrated monologue presents the initial focusing of feelings of anger and loss upon an external agent and then its transference to recriminatory self-chastisement ("It was indeed clear....if I had only had the sense..."), while the usage of quoted monologue to justify events ("Perhaps in a way, I reflected, it was just as well...") indicates that Charles needs to "say" this to himself to annul his underlying fear of the breakdown of his structuring Hartley-myth. "I gave her the meaning of my life long ago" (362), he tells Lizzie, demonstrating, in Lacan's terms, the way in which the "writing" "says what it knows while the subject does not know it" (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 166); evidence of an unconscious wisdom that suggests a new

subliminal awareness of the discrepancy between the force of his desire and the reality of its object. The point is made more overtly by James, who again likens Charles's belief in the power of his bond with Hartley to the idea of the phantom Helen: "She is real, as human creatures are, but what reality she has is elsewhere. She does not coincide with your dream figure. You were not able to transform her" (353).

Charles is, however, unable to relinquish his belief in such transformative powers, and maintains to James that Hartley will eventually come to him: "She's woven into me. Don't you understand how one can be absolutely connected with somebody like that?" (355) In a later, inebriated conversation with Lizzie, he asks her if she knows "what it's like when you have to *guard* somebody, to guard them in your heart against all damage and all darkness, and to sort of renew them as if you were God-" (361). The ideative realism that informs this recreation of the past and the present is made manifest by its all too real consequences: first someone pushes Charles into Minn's Cauldron, a lethally violent and deep whirlpool, from which he miraculously escapes, and then Titus drowns. Charles is immediately certain of Ben's culpability in both of these events, and constructs an elaborate "case" against him that serves to deflect his nascent awareness of the deeply illusory nature of his attachment to Hartley. "I sometimes felt that I hated him even more than I loved her" (393), he remarks revealingly. The extended rationale for this substitutory obsession is, however, punctuated by dissonant retrospective commentary that admits to a *consonant* awareness of its temporary and constructed nature:

I was sane enough to know that I was in a state of total obsession and that I *could only* think, over and over again, certain agonizing thoughts, *could only* run continually along the same rat-paths of fantasy and intent. But I was not sane enough to interrupt this mechanical movement or even to desire to do so. I wanted to kill Ben. (391)

Those who are caught in mental cages can often picture freedom, it just has no attractive power. I also knew in the midst of it all, that some unexamined guilt of my own was driving me further into hatred; but this was no moment to be confused by guilt. (394)

These interruptions of the consonant display of the "rat-paths of fantasy and intent" signal Charles's contemporaneous awareness of the falsity of his beliefs, and serve to distance us from them. We are thus prepared for Peregrine's admission that it was he who, still bitterly hurt and angry at the theft of Rosina and the casual destruction of their marriage, pushed Charles into Minn's Cauldron when drunk. The manifestation of this anger in such a serious form prompts Charles to a further contemplation of cause and effect, and the unexamined guilt that is connected to his hatred for Ben is located in the realisation that out of personal vanity and "a silly vicarious pride in his youth and strength" (402), he failed to warn Titus about the dangerousness and difficulty of getting out of a strong sea. The recognition of his own part in the boy's death displaces his former conjectures about Ben, and allows a perception of their projected nature: "my misery about Titus...was the more intense now that my obsessive belief about Ben had been taken away. It had indeed been a consolation, and Ben had carried my guilt" (402). The mental cage that constitutes his obsessive beliefs about Hartley is, however, less easily dismantled, and only after an invitation to tea at the Fitches has displayed to Charles a "happy couple in their

pretty little house" (428), does he begin to attempt its deconstruction:

I had invested so much, as the years went by, in my belief in Hartley's goodness....It was only now clear to me how very much I had *made* that image, and yet I could not feel that it was anything like a fiction. It was more like a special sort of truth, almost a touchstone (428).

Conradi writes that "*The Sea, The Sea* is a novel about how 'seeing with the mind's eye' is more than a dead metaphor (244), and goes on to discuss the manifestation of "*introspectabilia*" (245) in the sea serpent "image" of jealousy and guilt. In this last part of "History" we see also the way in which the very real force behind Charles's feeling for Hartley has recreated her as powerfully for him as an opposing "good" image of purified, unselfish, unpossessive love: the "shadows" that his memory of her has "bodied forth" in the past are here given substance, despite (or perhaps because of) his understanding of how little his feelings relate to "reality".

The strange thing was that there was still a source of light, as if Hartley herself shed light upon Hartley. I could take it all, I could embrace it all, whatever she was like it was her I loved...As James said, 'If even a dog's tooth is truly worshipped it glows with light' (430).

The idea of the ontological proof is again linked to the idea of Hartley as a light source, but marks the change from his early conception of her as the "one great light" that the exorcism of "history" has forced him to undergo. The ambiguous value of such a source of belief is alluded to by James in his final visit, where he describes the "real power" that the worshipper bestows upon the worshipped object as "dreadful stuff": "Our lusts and attachments

compose our god. And when one attachment is cast off another arrives by way of consolation" (445). James's own attachment to Charles is evident from his first "appearance" in letter form, and contrasts with Charles's apprehension of their relationship as deeply rivalrous; "*Cousinage, dangereux voisinage*", he is given to quoting darkly. The "rivalry" is soon shown up by James's affectionate behaviour as entirely one-sided, the projection of his youthful insecurities and jealousy on to a more accurate sense of a ground between them that is "both deep and old". "Our childhood memories are a common stock which we share with no one else" (57), he notes, acknowledging a bond that he later attributes only to his relationship with Hartley: "When you've known someone from childhood, when you can't remember when they weren't there, that's not an illusion. She's woven into me" (355).

Charles only becomes aware that he is also "absolutely connected" to James through such an historical interweaving after he remembers, first, that the sea serpent had been in the Cauldron with him, and then that James had impossibly raised him out of the lethal water, perhaps using one of the "tricks" that his practice of Tibetan Buddhism has engendered. The memory fills him "with the most piercing pure and tender joy, as if the sky had opened and a stream of white light had descended" (470), an apprehension of James as another light source that marks the real exorcism of the sea serpent of jealousy, and allows Charles to contemplate "history" without the projections that have fed his obsessions:

James had always been the finder of lost things. Had he stretched out some tentacle of his mind and found Titus and brought him here and kept him as it were under his care upon a binding thread, a thread of attention that was broken when James

became so strangely ill after I had been lifted from the sea?...There is a relentless causality of sin and in a way Titus died because, all those years ago, I had taken Rosina away from Peregrine. (471)

The new "light" on his relationship with his cousin, and consequent insight into the events of the recent past are immediately followed by the news of James's mysteriously willed death, leaving Charles with "an odd new sensation" of loneliness that exposes his early rhetoric of worldly renunciation as the playing of yet another part: "Without James I was at last alone. How very much I had somehow relied upon his presence in the world" (473). It is significantly the "departure" of James, and not that of Hartley and Ben for Australia, that he acknowledges here as the final stripping, inaugurating a shift of perspective that the ending of "History" subtly extends. After sleeping outside and seeing a magnificent star-scape, Charles wakes before dawn: "There was a complete yet somehow conscious silence, as if the travelling planet were noiselessly breathing. I remembered that James was dead. Who is one's first love? Who indeed" (476). The ellipses between these statements leave the question ambiguously suspended between a consonant, unsignaled quotation ("I thought to myself, 'Who is one's first love'"), and a gnomic conflation of the narrating and experiencing selves that conveys an ironic scepticism about self-knowledge and memory. Paradoxically this itself suggests a new wisdom and tolerance of indeterminacy that is confirmed by Charles's foreswearing of the "novelistic" end to his story provided by the sighting of an entirely different kind of sea-creature; four friendly and playful seals who he perceives as "beneficent beings come to visit and bless me" (476).

That no doubt is how the story ought to end, with the seals and the stars, explanation, resignation, reconciliation, everything picked up into some radiant bland ambiguous higher significance, in calm of mind, all passion spent. However, life, unlike art, has an irritating way of bumping and limping on, undoing conversions, casting doubt on solutions, and generally illustrating the impossibility of living happily or virtuously ever after; so I thought I might continue the tale a little longer in the form of a diary. (477)

This disruption of "History" by a "Postscript", (subtitled "Life Goes On") subverts the crafted form in a way that echoes the novel's opening, but reverses its content: there the malevolent image of the sea monster disproves Charles's confidence in his ability to structure his material, while here the beneficent sea vision is displaced by a fragmented narrative that eschews artistic self-definition. Living in James's flat amidst his oriental possessions, Charles reflects, in a disconnected series of "entries", on the events of the recent and further past, and comes, as James earlier predicts he will, to see Hartley as a wicked enchantress, and his "great 'illumination' a kind of nonsense": "She is gone, she is nothing for me, she no longer exists, and after all I fought for a phantom Helen. *On n'aime qu'une fois, la première.* What a lot of folly I have run through in aid of that stupid Gallicism!" (492). This implicit admission of the way in which literary codes and clichés have informed his interpretation of the past underlines the novel's play with its own generic conventions; "set literary ideas about love in the western tradition are here overturned", as Dipple puts it (287), and not least by the Postscript's devaluing of the "novel's" topic:

I wonder if I shall ever write that book about Clement? It is as if this book has taken up forever the space which I might have given to her. How unjust this seems now. Clement was the reality of my life, its bread and its wine. She made me, she

invented me, she created me....She, and not Hartley, was the reason why I never married (484).

The Postscript thus offers an allusive rewriting of the story that undercuts the stability of "History" in a way that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes in her translator's preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*: "the structure preface - text becomes open at both ends. The text has no stable identity, stable origin...each act of reading 'the text' is a preface to the next".¹² The Postscript similarly destabilises our reading of Charles's story through its precluding of closure, but works at the same time to naturalise the aesthetic unity of the central section by "realistically" asserting the impossibility of a definitive "H/history". Several interpretations of Hartley's feelings and reactions are proposed and then rejected, making it clear that there is no definitive "truth" to be discovered or "final clarificatory statement to be made" (490). "Judgements on people are never final, they emerge from summings up which at once suggest the need of a reconsideration", Charles writes at the beginning of the Postscript, and the diary form's reassertion of hegemony in the novel's hierarchy of discourses¹³ formally enacts the "loose ends and hazy reckoning" that characterise life, "whatever art may pretend in order to console us" (477).

Some loose ends are tied up, others engendered, as Charles intersperses speculation about the past with sporadic gossip and

¹². Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology*. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore 1977, xii.

¹³. The phrase is Catherine Belsey's in *Critical Practise*. Methuen: London and New York 1980.

discussion of both familiar and unknown characters: Lizzie and Gilbert get back together; Peregrine and Rosina start a theatre for "the people" in Ireland, where Peregrine is subsequently murdered by terrorists; Charles plays "celibate uncle-priest" to a variety of people, giving generously of both his money and his time; Peregrine's step-daughter, Angie, besieges him with letters asking him to give her a child. As Charles responds to all of this and struggles to accommodate his hard-won self-knowledge it becomes clear that readerly judgement must also forswear conclusiveness. "Am I after all alone now, as I intended to be, and without attachments? Is history over?" (501), he ponders, only to almost immediately record "a very tempting invitation to Japan" and an arrangement to have lunch with Angie. Finally, James's wooden casket, said to be like the ones in which lamas imprison demons, falls off the wall, bringing Charles's narrative to a wonderfully inconclusive halt: "Upon the demon-ridden pilgrimage of human life, what next I wonder?"

Like Valéry's poem, "Le cimetière marin", from which *The Sea, The Sea* takes its title, the novel meditates upon the difficulty of interpreting the world and the limitations of consciousness and perception. Conradi notes that "There is something awkward about trying to 'totalise' Murdoch's image of the untotalisable" (250), and that the sea "contains and represents 'everything', is a symbol for the uncoerced unconscious, source of all symbols, from which identity comes and to which it returns" (249). The brilliant evocation of the real that the novel achieves is imaged in this paradoxically "open" symbol, and produced through a superbly sustained tension between a tightly constructed form and a subversion of its own literary

premises: "presumptions of meaning" hold their own here against the "open world...of absurdity and loose ends and ignorance", balancing the limitations and triumphs of art and the unknowable world that it imitates; "La mer, la mer, toujours recommencée!"

CONCLUSION

It will, I imagine, seem ridiculous that things are made manifest through imitations in letters and syllables; nevertheless it cannot be otherwise.

Plato, *Craytylus*.

Since *The Sea, The Sea*, Murdoch has published four novels and a Platonic dialogue, *Acastos*; her output continues to be prolific and her variety of possible plots and characters seemingly inexhaustible. It is perhaps for this reason that it is so difficult to comment upon these later novels: a sense of their provisionality, of their part in an oeuvre, is oddly joined to an ever-increasing richness of detail, upholding what Lorna Sage has perceptively called her "aesthetic of imperfection". This, writes Sage, "mocks the critical demand for totalities, and makes fiction seem a living process" but can also show "the casual signs of haste and writing by formula which beset her".¹ The narrative strategies of the more recent novels seem to emphasise both these talents and weaknesses: a newly foregrounded omniscience coexists with an ever "untidier" fictional world in a way that insists on both its created-ness and its substantiality without always successfully maintaining a tension between the two. In *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), the artificiality of the fictional world, and the pleasure in imaginative creation are given "voice" through the employment of an anonymous first-person narrator, who describes himself as "a shadow, Nemo, not the masked presence or secret voice of one of the

¹. Sage, Lorna, "The Pursuit of Imperfection", *Critical Quarterly*, XIX, no.2 (Summer 1977), 68.

main characters", but who is a "real" person in the novel's created world of Ennistone ("N's Town"), "an observer, a student of human nature, a moralist" (23).² The decision to use the first-person without the personality perhaps provides an allegory for Murdoch's awareness of the figurative nature of any representation of the world, and a concomitant desire to move away from the limitations of narrative structure that the deployment of a central character-as-narrator imposes. It also suggests (and this is possibly where it jars upon poststructuralist sensibilities) an unfashionable confidence in the fictive version of the world that she can offer: N knows as much as any effaced omniscient voice, and tells us that he will allow himself "here and there the discreet luxury of moralizing" (23).

At the end of *The Good Apprentice* (1985), the central character, Edward, sees his tale as a "muddle, starting off with an accident", but also as "a whole complex thing, internally connected, like a dark globe, a dark world, as if we were all parts of a single drama, living inside a work of art". Perhaps, he thinks, "important things in life are always like that, so that you can think of them both ways" (517-8). I have tried to show through an examination of her narrative techniques that Murdoch's best work needs to be thought of in both ways, and that where the earlier novels pull more strongly towards an "internally connected" world of their own, they also "provide lucid commentaries on themselves",

². In conversation with me, Miss Murdoch identified "N" as the psychologist Ivor Sefton.

as Murdoch has suggested that all good art does.³ A consideration of *The Bell* and *The Unicorn* in terms of the correlation between "realism" and technical sophistication that Cohn implies in *Transparent Minds* suggests their respective enactment of "objective" and "subjective" ways of re-presenting the world; a division of narrative "purpose" that Murdoch describes in the early part of her career as an alternation between "open" and "closed" novels. Both of these, as Conradi says, offer "truth and pleasure" (159) of different kinds, and I suggested that these different readerly rewards are compounded by the combination of omniscience and polyphonously subjective perspective that Murdoch deploys in *An Accidental Man*. Here a sense of "muddle" and "accident" is allowed to emerge through the figural mediation of the story, rather than through authorial pronouncement, while at the same time the stylised narrative techniques are designed to remind us that it is also a "work of art".

The narratological examination of these third-person texts indicates also the ways in which Murdoch's fiction incorporates the comedic, the romantic and the gothic into a framework of orthodox verisimilitude, utilising the clashes between these genres to disclose the competing views of the real that constitute her version of "realism". I have suggested that the impossibility of unifying these competing realities is foregrounded in the first-person novels through the problematics of self-representation in a way that paradoxically feeds into a sense of their "realism": like

³. Murdoch, Iris, "Salvation by Words", *New York Review of Books*, 15 June 1972, 4.

contemporary poststructuralist thinkers, Murdoch is convinced of the essential disunity of the self, but unlike them remains unafraid of "the fallacy of unmediated expression".⁴ Both *Under the Net* and *The Black Prince* present a *psychomachia* and its "result" in the novel that we read, and both emphasise the process by which consonant character becomes dissonant narrator as a progressive tutelage in the "indecipherability" of the world. The enforced limitations of the first-person form naturalise the tensions between the structural organisation of the novels and the looseness and "muddle" that Murdoch sees as a partly necessary component of art: "'we are fake objects, fakes, bundles of illusion'", James reminds Charles in *The Sea*, *The Sea* when he declares his intention of doing "the deep thing, real analysis, real autobiography", and the novel is to prove him right without sacrificing "character" by demonstrating the different value of the impulses toward inarticulate "truth" and formal self-definition. "Of course this chattering diary is a facade, the literary equivalent of the everyday smiling face which hides...inward ravages", Charles writes after his education in the inauthenticities of a formal organisation of life; his newly acquired wisdom allowing him to recognise that "such pretences are not only consolations but may even be productive of a little ersatz courage" (483).

There is thus for Murdoch no simple division between the evils of a formal imposition and the integrity of the "real", and I offered

⁴. Salusinsky, Imre, Interview with Geoffrey Hartman, in *Criticism in Society*. Methuen: New York and London 1987, 85.

The Sea, The Sea as an example of the mastery with which she utilises the first-person form to fuse "myth" with character through their incorporation into the very act of and motivation for narration. A narratological analysis of the early novels and a consideration of the differing implications of the first- and third-person modes has, I hope, provided a theoretical grounding for the broader speculations about the more complex and successfully realised later works, and offered a way of discussing these without resulting in classifications or collapsing them back into suppositious ideatory "sources". J. Hillis Miller remarks in *The Linguistic Moment* that "Interpretation, 'literary criticism,' is not the detached statement of a knowledge objectively gained. It is the desperation of a bet, an ungrounded doing things with words: 'I bet this is a lyric poem,' or 'I bet this is an elegy,' or 'I bet this is a parable,' followed by the exegesis that is the consequence of the bet" (Salusinsky, 212). I have attempted to hedge my bets by employing narrative theory in the service of such exegesis, but would insist on its subservience to the fictional sources of the interpretive activity: Murdoch's novels are full of the "heterogeneous stuff" that Anne Cavidge in *Nuns and Soldiers* (1981) notes with amazement when she reads a novel for the first time in fifteen years, and are as such susceptible to as diverse a selection of readings. "What an extraordinary form it was, it told you about everything. How informative, how exciting, how funny, how terribly sentimental, how full of moral judgements!" (109): Anne's words may perhaps stand as an indication of the pleasures,

both simple and complex, that I have attempted to explore in this thesis.

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